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THE BLACK CAP

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The BLACK CAP

NEW STORIES of MURDER & MYSTERY

COMPILED BY

CYNTHIA·ASQUITH

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CYNTHIA ASQUITH

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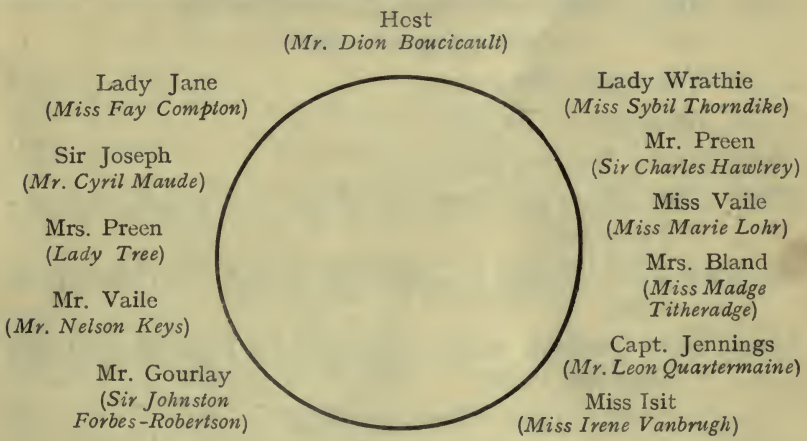
THE BLACK CAP

SHALL WE JOIN THE LADIES?

An Uncomfortable Play *

By J. M. Barrie

For the past week the hospitable Sam Smith *has been entertaining a country house party, and we choose to raise the curtain on them towards the end of dinner. They are seated thus, the host facing us :*



* This is the first act of an unfinished play originally produced at the opening of the Royal Dramatic Academy's theatre, which accounts for the brilliancy of the cast. Now first published.

Smith *is a little old bachelor, and sits there beaming on his guests like an elderly cupid. So they think him, but they are to be undeceived. Though many of them have not met until this week, they have at present that genial regard for each other which steals so becomingly over really nice people who have eaten too much.*

Dolphin, *the butler, is passing round the fruit. The only other attendant is a maid in the background, as for an emergency, and she is as interested in the conversation as he is indifferent to it. If one of the guests were to destroy himself,* Dolphin *would merely sign to her to remove the debris while he continued to serve the fruit.*

In the midst of hilarity over some quip that we are just too late to catch, the youthful Lady Jane *counts the company and is appalled.*

LADY JANE: We are thirteen, Lady Wrathie.

(*Many fingers count.*)

LADY WRATHIE: Fourteen.

CAPT. JENNINGS: Twelve.

LADY JANE: We are thirteen.

HOST: Oh, dear, how careless of me. Is there anything I can do?

SIR JOSEPH (*of the city*): Leave this to me. All keep your seats.

MRS. PREEN (*perhaps rather thankfully*): I am afraid Lady Jane has risen.

(Lady Jane *subsides.*)

LADY WRATHIE: Joseph, you have risen yourself.

(Sir Joseph *subsides.*)

MRS. CASTRO (*a mysterious widow from Buenos Ayres*): Were we thirteen all those other nights?

MRS. PREEN: We always had a guest or two from outside, you remember.

MISS ISIT (*whose name obviously needs to be queried*) : All we have got to do is to make our number fourteen.

VAILE : But how, Miss Isit?

MISS ISIT : Why, Dolphin, of course.

MRS. PREEN : It's too clever of you, Miss Isit. Mr. Smith, Dolphin may sit down with us, mayn't he?

MRS. CASTRO : Please, dear Mr. Smith; just for a moment. That breaks the spell.

SIR JOSEPH : We won't eat you, Dolphin. (*But he has crunched some similar ones.*)

HOST : Let me explain to him. You see, Dolphin, there is a superstition that if thirteen people sit down at table something staggering will happen to one of them before the night is out. That is it, isn't it?

MRS. BLAND (*darkly*) : Namely, death.

HOST (*brightly*) : Yes, namely, death.

LADY JANE : But not before the night is out, you dear; before the year is out.

HOST : I thought it was before the night is out.

(Dolphin *is reluctant.*)

GOURLAY : Sit here, Dolphin.

MISS VAILE : No, I want him.

MISS ISIT : It was my idea, and I insist on having him.

MRS. CASTRO : Yes, here between us.

(Dolphin *obliges.*)

MRS. PREEN (*with childish abandon*) : Saved.

HOST : As we are saved, and he does not seem happy, may he resume his duties?

LADY WRATHIE : Yes, yes; and now we ladies may withdraw.

PREEN (*the most selfish of the company, and therefore perhaps the favourite*) : First, a glass of wine with you, Dolphin.

VAILE (*ever seeking to undermine Preen's popularity*) : Is this wise?

PREEN (*determined to carry the thing through despite this fellow*) : To the health of our friend Dolphin.

(Dolphin's *health having been drunk, he withdraws his chair and returns to the sideboard. As* Miss Isit *and* Mrs. Castro *had made room for him between them exactly opposite his master, and the space remains empty, we have now a better view of the company. Can this have been the author's object?*)

SIR JOSEPH (*pleasantly detaining the ladies*) : One moment. Another toast. Fellow-guests, to-morrow morning, alas, this party has to break up, and I am sure you will all agree with me that we have had a delightful week. It has not been an eventful week; it has been too happy for that.

CAPT. JENNINGS : I rise to protest. When I came here a week ago I had never met Lady Jane. Now, as you know, we are engaged. I certainly call it an eventful week.

LADY JANE : Yes, please, Sir Joseph.

SIR JOSEPH : I stand corrected. And now we are in the last evening of it; we are drawing nigh to the end of a perfect day.

PREEN (*who is also an orator*) : In seconding this motion——

VAILE : Pooh. (*He is the perfect little gentleman, if socks and spats can do it.*)

SIR JOSEPH : Though I have known you intimately for but a short time, I already find it impossible to call you anything but Sam Smith.

MRS. CASTRO : In our hearts, Mr. Smith, that is what we ladies call you also.

PREEN : If I might say a word——

VAILE : Tuts.

SIR JOSEPH : Ladies and gentlemen, is he not like a pocket edition of Mr. Pickwick ?

GOURLAY (*an artist*) : Exactly. That is how I should like to paint him.

MRS. BLAND : Mr. Smith, you love, we think that if you were married you could not be quite so nice.

SIR JOSEPH : At any rate, he could not be quite so simple. For you are a very simple soul, Sam Smith. Well, we esteem you the more for your simplicity. Friends all, I give you the toast of Sam Smith.

(*The toast is drunk with acclamation, and* Dolphin, *who has paid no attention to it, again hovers round with wine.*)

HOST (*rising in answer to their appeals and warming them with his Pickwickian smile*) : Ladies and gentlemen, you are very kind, and I don't pretend that it isn't pleasant to me to be praised. Tell me, have you ever wondered why I invited you here ?

MISS ISIT : Because you like us, of course, you muddle-headed darling.

HOST : Was that the reason ?

SIR JOSEPH : Take care, Sammy, you are not saying what you mean.

HOST: Am I not? Kindly excuse. I daresay I am as simple as Sir Joseph says. And yet, do you really know me? Does any person ever know another absolutely? Has not the simplest of us a secret drawer inside him with—with a lock to it?

MISS ISIT: If you have, Mr. Smith, be a dear and open it to us.

MRS. CASTRO: How delicious. He is going to tell us of his first and only love.

HOST: Ah, Mrs. Castro, I think I had one once, very nice, but I have forgotten her name. The person I loved best was my brother.

PREEN: I never knew you had a brother.

HOST: I suppose none of you knew. He died two years ago.

SIR JOSEPH: Sorry, Sam Smith.

MRS. PREEN (*drawing the chocolates nearer her*): We should like to hear about him if it isn't too sad.

HOST: Would you? He was many years my junior, and as attractive as I am commonplace. He died in a foreign land. Natural causes were certified. But there were suspicious circumstances, and I went out there determined to probe the matter to the full. And I did, too.

PREEN: You didn't say where the place was.

HOST: It was Monte Carlo.

(*He pauses here, as if to give time for something to happen, but nothing does happen except that* Miss Isit's *wine-glass slips from her hand to the floor.*)

Dolphin, another glass for Miss Isit.

LADY JANE: Do go on.

HOST : My enquiries were slow, but I became convinced that my brother had been poisoned.

MRS. BLAND : How dreadful. You poor man.

GOURLAY : I hope, Sam Smith, that you got on the track of the criminals ?

HOST : Oh yes.

(A chair creaks.)

Did you speak, Miss Isit ?

MISS ISIT : Did I ? I think not. What did you say about the criminals ?

HOST : Not criminals ; there was only one.

PREEN : Man or woman ?

HOST : We are not yet certain. What we do know is that my brother was visited in his rooms that night by someone who must have been the murderer. It was someone who spoke English and who was certainly dressed as a man, but it may have been a woman. There is proof that it was someone who had been to the tables that night. I got in touch with every " possible," though I had to follow some of them to distant parts.

LADY WRATHIE : It is extraordinarily interesting.

HOST : Outwardly many of them seemed to be quite respectable people.

SIR JOSEPH : Ah, one can't go by that, Sam Smith.

HOST : I didn't. I made the most exhaustive enquiries into their private lives. I did it so cunningly that not one of them suspected why I was so anxious to make his or her acquaintance ; and then, when I was ready for them, I invited them to my house for a week, and they are all sitting round my table this evening.

(As the monstrous significance of this sinks into them, there is a hubbub at the table.)

You wanted to know why I had asked you here, and I am afraid that in consequence I have wandered a little from the toast; but I thank you, Sir Joseph, I thank you all, for the too kind way in which you have drunk my health.

(*He sits down as modestly as he had risen, but the smile has gone from his face; and the curious—which includes all the diners—may note that he is licking his lips. In the babel that again breaks forth,* Dolphin, *who has remained stationary and vacuous for the speech, goes the round of the table refilling glasses.*)

PREEN (*the first to be wholly articulate*): In the name of every one of us, Mr. Smith, I tell you that this is an outrage.

HOST: I was afraid you wouldn't like it.

SIR JOSEPH: May I ask, sir, whether all this week you have been surreptitiously ferreting into our private affairs, perhaps even rummaging our trunks?

HOST (*brightening*): That was it. You remember how I pressed you all to show your prowess on the tennis courts and the golf links while I stayed at home? That was my time for the trunks.

LADY JANE: Was there ever such a man? Did you—open our letters?

HOST: Every one of them. And there were some very queer things in them. There was one about a luncheon at the Ritz. "You will know me," the man wrote, "by the gardenia I shall carry in my hand." Perhaps I shouldn't have mentioned that. But the lady who got that letter need not be frightened. She is married, and her husband is here with her, but I won't tell you any more.

MISS ISIT : I think he should be compelled to tell.

PREEN : Wrathie, there are only two ladies here with their husbands.

SIR JOSEPH : Yours and mine, Preen.

LADY WRATHIE : Joseph, I don't need to tell you it wasn't your wife.

MRS. PREEN : It certainly wasn't yours, Willie.

PREEN (*with a sinking*) : Of that I am well assured.

SIR JOSEPH : Take care what you say, Preen. That is very like a reflection on my wife.

GOURLAY : Let that pass. The other is the serious thing—so serious that it is a nightmare. Whom do you accuse of doing away with your brother, sir? Out with it.

HOST : You are not all turning against me, are you? I assure you I don't accuse any of you yet. I know that one of you did it, but I am not sure which one. I shall know soon.

VAILE : Soon? How soon?

HOST : Soon after the men join the ladies to-night. I ought to tell you that I am to try a little experiment to-night, something I have thought out which I have every confidence will make the guilty person fall into my hands like a ripe plum. (*He indicates rather horribly how he will squeeze it.*)

LADY JANE (*hitting his hand*) : Don't do that.

SIR JOSEPH (*voicing the general unrest*) : We insist, Smith, on hearing what this experiment is to be.

HOST : That would spoil it. But I can tell you this. My speech had a little pit in it, and all the time I was talking I was watching whether any of you would fall into that pit.

MRS. PREEN (*rising*) : I didn't notice any pit.

HOST : You weren't meant to, Mrs. Preen.

PREEN : May I ask, without pressing the personal note, did anyone fall into your pit?

HOST : I think so.

CAPT. JENNINGS : Smith, we must have the name of this person.

LADY WRATHIE : Mrs. Preen has fainted.

(Preen *hurries slowly to his wife's assistance, and there is some commotion.*)

MRS. PREEN : Why—what—who—I am all right now. Willie, go back to your seat. Why are you all staring at me so?

MISS ISIT : Dear Mrs. Preen, we are so glad that you are better. I wonder what upset you?

PREEN (*imprudently*) : I never knew her faint before.

MISS ISIT : I expect it was the heat.

PREEN (*nervous*) : Say it was the heat, Emily.

MRS. PREEN : No, it wasn't the heat, Miss Isit. It was Mr. Smith's talk of a pit.

PREEN : My dear.

MRS. PREEN : I suddenly remembered how, as soon as that man mentioned that the place of the crime was Monte Carlo, some lady had let her wine-glass fall. That was why I fainted. I can't remember who she was.

LADY WRATHIE : It was Miss Isit.

MRS. PREEN : Really?

MISS ISIT : There is a thing called the law of libel. If Lady Wrathie and Mrs. Preen will kindly formulate their charges——

GOURLAY : Oh, come, let us keep our heads.

HOST : That's what I say.

GOURLAY : What about a motive? Scotland Yard always seeks for that first.

HOST : I see two possible motives. If a woman did it—well, they tended to run after my brother, and you all know of what a woman scorned is capable.

PREEN (*reminiscent*) : Rather.

HOST : Then, again, my brother had a large sum of money with him, which disappeared.

SIR JOSEPH : If you could trace that money it might be a help.

HOST : All sorts of things are a help. The way you are all pretending to know nothing about the matter is a help. It might be a help if I could find out which of you has a clammy hand that at this moment wants to creep beneath the table.

(*Not a hand creeps.*)

I'll tell you something more. Murderers' hearts beat differently from other hearts. (*He raises his finger.*) Listen.

(*They listen.*)

Whose was it?

(*A cry from* Miss Vaile *brings her into undesired prominence.*)

MISS VAILE (*explaining*) : I thought I heard it. It seemed to come from across the table.

(*This does not give universal satisfaction.*)

Please don't think because this man made me scream that I did it. I never was on a yacht in my life, at Monte Carlo or anywhere else.

(*Nor does even this have the desired effect.*)

VAILE (*sharply*) : Bella.

MISS VAILE : Have I—said anything odd?

GOURLAY: A yacht? There has been no talk about a yacht.

MISS VAILE (*shrinking*): Hasn't there?

HOST: Perhaps there should have been. It was on his yacht that my brother died.

MRS. CASTRO: You said in his rooms.

HOST: Yes, that is what I said. I wanted to find out which of you knew better.

LADY JANE: And Miss Vaile——

MISS VAILE: I can explain it all if—if——

MISS ISIT: Yes, give her a little time.

HOST: Perhaps you would all like to take a few minutes.

MISS VAILE: I admit that I was at Monte Carlo—with my brother—when an Englishman died there rather mysteriously on a yacht. When Mr. Smith told us of his brother's death, I concluded that it was probably the same person.

VAILE: I presume that you accept my sister's statement?

MISS ISIT: Ab-sol-ute-ly.

HOST: She is not the only one of you who knew that yacht. You all admit having been at Monte Carlo two years ago, I suppose?

CAPT. JENNINGS: One of us wasn't. Lady Jane was never there.

HOST (*with beady eyes*): What do you say to that, Lady Jane?

(Lady Jane *falters*.)

CAPT. JENNINGS: Tell him, Jane.

HOST: Yes, tell me.

CAPT. JENNINGS: You never were there; say so.

LADY JANE: Why shouldn't I have been there?

CAPT JENNINGS : No reason. But when I happened to mention Monte Carlo to you the other day I certainly understood—— Jane, I never forget a word you say, and you did say you had never been there.

LADY JANE : So you—you, Jack—you accuse me—you—me——

CAPT. JENNINGS : I haven't, I haven't.

LADY JANE : You have all heard that Captain Jennings and I are engaged. I want you to understand that we are so no longer.

CAPT. JENNINGS : Jane.

(*She removes the engagement ring from her finger and hesitates how to transfer it to the donor, who is many seats apart from her. The ever-resourceful* Dolphin *goes to her with a tray on which she deposits the ring, and it is thus conveyed to the unhappy* Jennings. *Next moment* Dolphin *has to attend to the maid, who makes an audible gurgle of sympathy with love, which is a breach of etiquette. He opens the door for her, and she makes a shameful exit. He then fills the Captain's glass.*)

HOST (*in one of his nicer moods*) : Take comfort, Captain. If Lady Jane should prove to be the person wanted—mind you, perhaps she isn't—why, then the ring is a matter of small importance, because you would be parted in any case. I mean by the handcuffs. I forgot to say that I have them here. (*He gropes at his feet, where other people merely have a table-napkin.*) Pass them round, Dolphin. Perhaps some of you have never seen them before.

PREEN : A pocket edition of Pickwick we called him ; he is more like a pocket edition of the devil.

HOST : Please, a little courtesy. After all, I am your host.

(Dolphin *goes the round of the table with the handcuffs on the tray that a moment ago contained a lover's ring. They meet with no success.*)

Do take a look at them, Mrs. Castro ; they are an adjustable pair in case they should be needed for small wrists. Would you like to try them on, Sir Joseph ? They close with a click—a click.

SIR JOSEPH (*pettishly*) : We quite understand.

(Mrs. Bland *rises.*)

MRS. BLAND : How stupid of us. We have all forgotten that he said the murderer may have been a woman in man's clothes, and I have just remembered that when we played the charade on Wednesday he wanted the ladies to dress up as men. Was it to see whether one of us looked as if she could have passed for a man that night at Monte Carlo ?

HOST : You've got it, Mrs. ~~Castro.~~ Bland

SIR JOSEPH : Well, none of you did dress up, at any rate.

MRS. BLAND (*distressed*) : Oh, Sir Joseph. Some of us did dress up, in private, and we all agreed that—of course there's nothing in it, but we all agreed that the only figure which might have deceived a careless eye was Lady Wrathie's.

PREEN : I say !

LADY WRATHIE : Joseph, do you sit there and permit this ?

HOST : Now, now, there is nothing to be touchy about. Have I not been considerate ?

SIR JOSEPH : Smith, I hold you to be an impudent scoundrel.

HOST : May not I, who lost a brother in circumstances so painful, appeal for a little kindly consideration from those of you who are innocent—shady characters though you be ?

PREEN : I must say that rather touches me. Some of us might have reasons for being reluctant to have our past at Monte enquired into without being the person you are asking for.

HOST : Precisely. I am presuming that to be the position of eleven of you.

LADY WRATHIE : Joseph, I must ask you to come upstairs with me to pack our things.

MISS ISIT : For my part, after poor Mr. Smith's appeal I think it would be rather heartless not to stay and see the thing out. Especially, Mr. Smith, if you would give us just an inkling of what your—little experiment—in the drawing-room—is to be ?

HOST : I can't say anything about it except that it isn't to take place in the drawing-room. You ladies are to go this evening to Dolphin's room, where we shall join you presently.

(*Even* Dolphin *is taken aback.*)

MRS. PREEN : Why should we go there ?

HOST : Because I tell you to, Mrs. Preen.

LADY WRATHIE : I go to no such room. I leave this house at once.

MRS. PREEN : I also.

LADY JANE : All of us. I want to go home.

LADY WRATHIE : Joseph, come.

MRS. PREEN: Willie, I am ready. I wish you a long good-bye, Mr. Smith.

(*Their dignified advance upon the door is spoilt on opening it by their finding a policeman* (*Mr. Norman Forbes*) *standing there. They glare at* Mr. Smith.)

HOST: The ladies will now adjourn to Dolphin's room.

LADY WRATHIE: I say no.

MRS. CASTRO: Let us. Why shouldn't the innocent ones help him?

(*She gives* Smith *her hand with a disarming smile.*)

HOST: I knew you would be on my side, Mrs. Castro. Cold hand—warm heart. That is the saying, isn't it?

(*She shrinks.*)

LADY WRATHIE: Those who wish to leave this man's house, follow me.

HOST (*for her special benefit*): My brother's cigarette case was of faded green leather, and a hole had been burned in the back of it.

(*For some reason this takes the fight out of her, and she departs for* Dolphin's *room, tossing her head, and followed by the other ladies.*)

VAILE (*seeing Smith drop a word to* Miss Vaile as she goes): What did you say to my sister?

HOST: I only said to her that she isn't your sister. (*The last lady to go is* Miss Isit). So you never met my brother, Miss Isit?

MISS ISIT: Not that I know of, Mr. Smith.

HOST: I have a photograph of him that I should like to show you.

MISS ISIT : I don't care to see it.

HOST : You are going to see it. (*It is in his pocket, and he suddenly puts it before her eyes.*)

MISS ISIT (*surprised*) : That is not—— (*She checks herself.*)

HOST : No, that is not my brother. That is someone you have never seen. But how did you know it wasn't my brother?

(*She makes no answer.*)

I rather think you knew Dick, Miss Isit.

MISS ISIT (*dropping him a curtsey*) : I rather think I did, Mr. Sam. What then?

(*She goes impudently. Now that the ladies have left the room, the men don't quite know what to do except stare at their little host. Decanter in one hand and a box of cigarettes in the other, he toddles down to what would have been the hostess's chair had there been a hostess.*)

HOST : Draw up closer, won't you?

(*They don't want to, but they do, with the exception of* Vaile, *who is studying a picture very near the door.*)

You are not leaving us, Vaile?

VAILE : I thought——

HOST (*sharply*) : Sit down.

VAILE : Oh, quite.

HOST : You are not drinking anything, Gourlay. Captain, the port is with you.

(*The wine revolves, but no one partakes.*)

PREEN (*heavily*) : Smith, there are a few words that I think it my duty to say. This is a very unusual situation.

HOST: Yes. You'll have a cigarette, Preen?

(*The cigarettes are passed round and share the fate of the wine.*)

GOURLAY: I wonder why Mrs. Bland—she is the only one of them that there seems to be nothing against.

VAILE: A bit fishy, that.

PREEN (*murmuring*): It was rather odd my wife fainting.

CAPT. JENNINGS (*who has been a drooping figure since a recent incident*): I daresay the ladies are saying the same sort of thing about us. (*He lights a cigarette—one of his own.* Dolphin *is offering them liqueurs.*)

PREEN (*sulkily*): No, thanks. (*But he takes one.*) Smith, I am sure I speak for all of us when I say we should esteem it a favour if you would ask Dolphin to withdraw.

HOST: He has his duties.

GOURLAY (*pettishly, to* Dolphin): No, thanks. He gets on my nerves. Can nothing disturb this man?

CAPT. JENNINGS (*also refusing*): No, thanks. Evidently nothing.

SIR JOSEPH (*reverting to a more hopeful subject*): Everything seems to point to its being a woman—wouldn't you say, Smith?

HOST: I wouldn't say everything, Sir Joseph. Dolphin thinks it was a man.

SIR JOSEPH: One of us here?

(Smith *nods, and they survey their friend* Dolphin *with renewed distaste.*)

GOURLAY: Did he know your brother?

HOST: He was my brother's servant out there.

VAILE (*rising*) : What? He wasn't the fellow who——?

HOST : Who what, Vaile?

PREEN : I say.

VAILE (*hotly*) : What do you say?

PREEN : Nothing (*doggedly*) But I say.

(*Though* Dolphin *is now a centre of interest, no one seems able to address him personally.*)

GOURLAY : Are we to understand that you have had Dolphin spying on us here?

HOST : That was the idea. And he helped me by taking your finger-prints.

VAILE : How can that help?

HOST : He sent them to Scotland Yard.

SIR JOSEPH (*vindictively*) : Oh, he did, did he?

PREEN : What shows finger-marks best?

HOST : Glass, I believe.

PREEN (*putting down his glass*) : Now I see why the Americans went dry.

SIR JOSEPH : Smith, how can you be sure that Dolphin wasn't the man himself?

(Mr. Smith *makes no answer.* Dolphin *picks up* Sir Joseph's *napkin and returns it to him.*)

PREEN : Somehow I still cling to the hope that it was a woman.

VAILE : If it is a woman, Smith, what will you do?

HOST : She shall hang by the neck until she is dead. You won't try the benedictine, Vaile?

VAILE : No thanks.

(*The maid returns with coffee, which she presents under* Dolphin's *superintendence. Most of them accept. The cups are already full.*)

SIR JOSEPH (*in his lighter manner*) : Did you notice what the ladies are doing in Dolphin's room, Lucy?

MAID (*in a tremble, and wishing she could fly from this house*) : Yes, Sir Joseph, they are wondering, Sir Joseph, which of you it was that did it.

PREEN : How like women.

GOURLAY : By the way, Smith, do you know how the poison was administered?

HOST : Yes, in coffee. (*He is about to help himself.*)

MAID : You are to take the yellow cup, sir.

HOST : Who said so?

MAID : The lady who poured out this evening, sir.

PREEN : Aha, who was she?

MAID : Lady Jane Wraye, sir.

PREEN : I don't like it.

GOURLAY : Smith, don't drink that coffee.

CAPT. JENNINGS (*in wrath*) : Why shouldn't he drink it?

GOURLAY : Well, if it was she—a desperate woman—it was given in coffee the other time, remember. But stop, she wouldn't be likely to do it in the same way a second time.

VAILE : I'm not so sure. Perhaps she doesn't suspect that Smith knows how it was given the first time. We didn't know till the ladies had left the room.

PREEN (*admiring him at last*) : I say, Vaile, that's good.

CAPT. JENNINGS : I have no doubt she merely meant that she had sugared it to his taste.

VAILE : Sugar.

PREEN (*pinning his faith to* Vaile) : Sugar.

GOURLAY : Couldn't we analyse it?

CAPT. JENNINGS (*the one who is at present looking most like a murderer*) : Smith, I insist on your drinking that coffee.

VAILE : Lady Jane. Who would have thought it.

PREEN (*become a mere echo of Vaile*) : Lady Jane. Who would have thought it.

CAPT. JENNINGS : Give me the yellow cup. (*He drains it to the dregs.*)

SIR JOSEPH : Nobly done, in any case. Look here, Jennings—you are among friends—it hadn't an odd taste, had it?

CAPT. JENNINGS : Not a bit.

VAILE : He wouldn't feel the effects yet.

PREEN : He wouldn't feel them yet.

HOST : Vaile ought to know.

PREEN : Vaile knows.

SIR JOSEPH : Why ought Vaile to know, Smith?

HOST : He used to practise as a doctor.

SIR JOSEPH : You never mentioned that to me, Vaile.

VAILE : Why should I?

HOST : Why should he? He is not allowed to practise now.

(*We now see that* Vaile *has unpleasant teeth.*)

PREEN : A doctor—poison—ease of access. (*His passion for* Vaile *is shattered. He gives him back the ring, as* Capt. Jennings *might say, and wanders the room despondently.*)

SIR JOSEPH : We are where we were again.

(Dolphin *escorts out the maid, who is not in a condition to go alone.*)

CAPT. JENNINGS : At any rate that fellow has gone.

GOURLAY (*the first to laugh for some time*) : Excuse me. I suddenly remembered that Wrathie had called this the end of a perfect day.

HOST : It isn't ended yet.

(Mr. Preen *in his wanderings toward the sideboard encounters a very large glass and a small bottle of brandy. He introduces them to each other. He swirls the contents in the glass as if hopeful that it may climb the rim and so escape without his having to drink it. This is a trick which has become so common with him that when lost in thought he sometimes goes through the motion though there is no glass in his hand.*)

PREEN (*communing with his ego*) : I feel I am not my old bright self. (*Sips.*) I can't believe for a moment that it was my wife. (*Sips.*) And yet —(*sips*)—that fainting, you know. (*Sips.*) I should go away for a bit until it blew over. (*Sips.*) I don't think I should ever marry again. (*Sips and sips, and becomes perhaps a little more like his old bright self.*)

GOURLAY : There is something shocking about sitting here, suspecting each other in this way. Let us go to that room and have it out.

HOST : I am quite ready. Nothing more to drink, anyone? Bring your cigarette, Captain.

SIR JOSEPH (*hoarsely*) : Smith—Sam—before we go, can I have a word with you alone?

HOST : Sorry, Joseph. And now, shall we join the ladies?

(*As they rise, a dreadful scream is heard from the direction of* Dolphin's *room—a woman's scream. Next moment* Dolphin *reappears in the doorway. He is no longer*

the imperturbable butler. He is livid. He tries to speak, but no words will come out of his mouth. Capt. Jennings *dashes past him, and the others follow. He looks at his master with mingled horror and appeal, and then goes.* Smith *sits down again to take one glass of brandy. Where he sits we cannot see his face, but his rigid little back is merciless. As he rises to follow the others the curtain falls on act one.*)

THE KILLING-BOTTLE

By L. P. Hartley

Unlike the majority of men, Jimmy Rintoul enjoyed the hour or so's interval between being called and having breakfast; for it was the only part of the day upon which he imposed an order. From nine-fifteen onwards the day imposed its order upon him. The 'bus, the office, the hasty city luncheon; then the office, the bus, and the unsatisfactory interval before dinner: such a promising time and yet, do what he would with it, it always seemed to be wasted. If he was going to dine alone at his club, he felt disappointed and neglected; if, as seldom happened, in company, he felt vaguely apprehensive. He expected a good deal from his life, and he never went to bed without the sense of having missed it. Truth to tell, he needed a stimulus, the stimulus of outside interest and appreciation, to get the best out of himself. In a competitive society, with rewards dangled before his eyes, his nature fulfilled itself and throve. How well he had done at school, and even afterwards, while his parents lived to applaud his efforts. Now he was thirty-three; his parents were dead; there was no one close enough to him to care whether he made a success of his life or not. Nor did life hand out to grown-up men incontestable signs of merit and excellence, prizes bound in vellum or silver cups standing proudly on ebony pedestals. No, its awards were far less tangible, and Jimmy, from the shelter of his solicitors' office, sometimes felt glad that its more sensational prizes were passing out of his reach—that he need no longer

feel obliged, as he had once felt, to climb the Matterhorn, play the Moonlight Sonata, master the Spanish language, and read the Critique of Pure Reason, before he died. His ambition was sensibly on the ebb.

But not in the mornings. The early mornings were still untouched by the torpors of middle-age. Dressing was for Jimmy a ritual, and like all rituals it looked forward to a culmination. Act followed act in a recognised sequence, each stage contributing its peculiar thrill, opening his mind to a train of stimulating and agreeable thoughts, releasing it, encouraging it. And the culmination: what was it? Only his morning's letters and the newspaper! Not very exciting. But the newspaper might contain one of those helpful, sympathetic articles about marriage, articles that warned the reader not to rush into matrimony, but to await the wisdom that came with the early and still more with the late thirties; articles which, with a few tricks of emphasis, of skipping here and reading between the lines there, demonstrated that Jimmy Rintoul's career, without any effort of his own, was shaping itself on sound, safe lines. The newspaper, then, for reassurance; the letters for surprise! And this morning an interesting letter would be particularly welcome. It would distract his mind from a vexing topic that even the routine of dressing had not quite banished—the question of his holiday, due in a fortnight's time.

Must it be Swannick Fen again? Partly for lack of finding others to take their place he had cherished the interests of his boyhood, of which butterfly-collecting was the chief. He was solitary and competitive, and the hobby ministered to both these traits. But alas, he had not the patience of the true collector; his interest fell short of the lesser breeds, the irritating varieties of Wainscots and Footmen and what-nots. It embraced only the more sensational insects—the large, the beautiful, and the rare. His desire had fastened itself on the

Swallow-tail butterfly as representing all these qualities. So he went to Swannick, found the butterfly, bred it, and presently had a whole hutch-full of splendid green caterpillars. Their mere number, the question of what to do with them when they came out, whether to keep them all in their satiating similarity, to give them away, or to sell them; to let them go free so that the species might multiply, to the benefit of all collectors; to kill all but a few, thus enhancing the value of his own—these problems vexed his youthful, ambitious, conscientious mind. Finally he killed them all. But the sight of four setting-boards plastered with forty identical insects destroyed by a surfeit his passion for the Swallow-tail butterfly. He had coaxed it with tempting baits: the Pine Hawk moth, the Clifden Nonpareil; but it would not respond, would accept no *pis aller*, being, like many passions, monogamous and constant. Every year, in piety, in conservatism, in hope, he still went to Swannick Fen; but with each visit the emotional satisfaction diminished. Soon it would be gone.

However, there on his dressing-table (for some reason) stood the killing-bottle—mutely demanding prey. Almost without thinking he released the stopper and snuffed up the almond-breathing fumes. A safe, pleasant smell; he could never understand how anything died of it, or why cyanide of potassium should figure in the chemists' book of poisons. But it did; he had had to put his name against it. Now, since the stuff was reputed to be so deadly, he must add a frail attic to the edifice of dressing, and once more wash his hands before breakfast. In a fortnight's time, he thought, I shall be doing this twenty times a day.

On the breakfast-table lay a large, shiny blue envelope. He did not recognise the handwriting, nor, when he examined the post-mark, did it convey anything to him. The flap, gummed to the top and very strong, resisted his fingers. He opened it with a knife and read:

Verdew Castle.

My dear Rintoul,

How did you feel after our little dinner on Saturday? None the worse, I hope. However, I'm not writing to enquire about your health, which seems pretty good, but about your happiness, or what I should like to think would be your happiness. Didn't I hear you mutter (the second time we met, I think it was, at Smallhouse's) something about going for a holiday in the near future? Well, then, couldn't you spend it here with us, at Verdew? Us being my brother Randolph, my wife, and your humble servant. I'm afraid there won't be a party for you; but we could get through the day somehow, and play bridge in the evenings. Randolph and you would make perfect partners, you would be so kind to each other. And didn't you say you collected bugs? Then by all means bring your butterfly-net and your killing-bottle and your other engines of destruction and park them here; there are myriads of green-flies, bluebottle-flies, may-flies, dragon-flies, and kindred pests which would be all the better for your attentions. Now don't say no. It would be a pleasure to us, and I'm sure it would amuse you to see ye olde castle and us living in our mediæval seclusion. I await the favour of a favourable reply, and will then tell you the best way of reaching the Schloss, as we sometimes call it in our German fashion.

Yours,
Rollo Verdew.

Jimmy stared at this facetious epistle until its purport faded from his mind, leaving only a blurred impression of redundant loops and twirls. Verdew's handwriting was like himself, bold and dashing and unruly. At least, this was the estimate Jimmy had formed of him, on the strength of three meetings. He had been rather taken by the man's bluff, hearty manner, but he did not expect Verdew to like him: they were birds of a different feather. He hadn't felt very well after the dinner, having

drunk more than was good for him in the effort to fall in with his host's mood; but apparently he had succeeded better than he thought. Perhaps swashbucklers like Verdew welcomed mildness in others. If not, why this invitation? He considered it. The district might be entomologically rich. Where exactly was Verdew Castle? He had, of course, a general idea of its locality, correct to three counties; he knew it was somewhere near the coast. Further than that, nothing; and directly he began to sift his knowledge he found it to be even less helpful than he imagined. The note-paper gave a choice of stations: wayside stations they must be, they were both unknown to him. The postal, telegraphic, and telephonic addresses all confidently cited different towns—Kirton Tracy, Shrivecross, and Pawlingham—names which seemed to stir memories but never fully awakened recollection. Still, what did it matter? Verdew had promised to tell him the best route, and it was only a question of getting there, after all. He could find his own way back.

Soon his thoughts, exploring the future, encountered an obstacle and stopped short. He was looking ahead as though he had made up his mind to go. Well, hadn't he? The invitation solved his immediate difficulty: the uncertainty as to where he should take his holiday. The charm of Swannick had failed to hold him. And yet, perversely enough, his old hunting-ground chose this very moment to trouble him with its lures: its willows, its alders, the silent clumps of grey rushes with the black water in between. The conservatism of his nature, an almost superstitious loyalty to the preferences of his early life, protested against the abandonment of Swannick—Swannick, where he had always done exactly as he liked, where bridge never intruded, and the politenesses of society were unknown. For Jimmy's mind had run forward again, and envisaged existence at Verdew Castle as divided between holding open the door for Mrs. Rollo

Verdew, and exchanging compliments and forbearances and commiseration with Rollo's elder (or perhaps younger, he hadn't said) brother Randolph across the bridge-table, with a lot of spare time that wasn't really spare and a lot of being left to himself that really meant being left to everybody.

Jimmy looked at the clock: it was time to go. If it amused his imagination to fashion a mythical Verdew Castle, he neither authorised nor forbade it. He still thought himself free to choose. But when he reached his office his first act was to write his friend a letter of acceptance.

Four days later a second blue envelope appeared on his breakfast-table. It was evidently a two-days' post to Verdew Castle, for Rollo explained that he had that moment received Jimmy's welcome communication. There followed a few references, necessarily brief, to matters of interest to them both. The letter closed with the promised itinerary :

So we shall hope to see you in ten days' time, complete with lethal chamber and big-game apparatus. I forget whether you have a car ; but if you have, I strongly advise you to leave it at home. The road bridge across the estuary has been dicky for a long time. They may close it any day now, since it was felt to wobble the last time the Lord-Lieutenant crossed by it. You would be in a mess if you found it shut and had to go trailing thirty miles to Amplesford (a hellish road, since it's no one's interest to keep it up). If the bridge carried the Lord-Lieutenant it would probably bear you, but I shouldn't like to have your blood on my head! Come, then, by train to Verdew Grove. I recommend the four o'clock ; it doesn't get here till after dark, but you can dine on it, and it's almost express part of the way. The morning train is too bloody for anything : you would die of boredom before you arrived, and I should hate that to happen to any of my guests. I'm sorry to present you

with such ghastly alternatives, but the Castle was built here to be out of everyone's reach, and by Heaven, it is! Come prepared for a long stay. You must. I'm sure the old office can get on very well without you. You're lucky to be able to go away as a matter of course, like a gentleman. Let us have a line and we'll send to meet you, not my little tin kettle but Randolph's large, majestic Daimler. Good-bye.

Yours,
Rollo.

. . . . . .

It was indeed a troublesome, tedious journey, involving changes of train and even of station. More than once the train, having entered a terminus head first, steamed out tail first, with the result that Rintoul lost his sense of direction and had a slight sensation of vertigo whenever, in thought, he tried to recapture it. It was half-past nine, and the sun was setting, when they crossed the estuary. As always in such places, the tide was low and the sun's level beams illuminated the too rotund and luscious curves of a series of mud-flats. The railway-line approached the estuary from its marshy side, by a steep embankment. Near by, and considerably below, ran the road bridge—an antiquated affair of many arches, but apparently still in use, though there seemed to be no traffic on it. The line curved inwards, and by straining his neck Rintoul could see the train bent like a bow, and the engine approaching a hole, from which a few wisps of smoke still issued, in the ledge of rock that crowned the further shore. The hole rushed upon him; Rintoul pulled in his head and was at once in darkness. The world never seemed to get light again. After the long tunnel they were among hills that shut out the light that would have come in, and stifled the little that was left behind. It was by the help of the station lantern that he read the name, Verdew Grove, and when they were putting his luggage on the motor he could scarcely distin-

guish between the porter and the chauffeur. One of them said :

" Did you say it was a rabbit ? "

And the other : " Well, there was a bit of fur stuck to the wheel."

" You'd better not let the boss see it," said the first speaker.

" Not likely." And so saying, the chauffeur, who seemed to be referring to an accident, climbed into the car. As Rollo had said, it was a very comfortable one. Jimmy gave up counting the turns and trying to catch glimpses of the sky over the high hedges, and abandoned himself to drowsiness. He must have dozed, for he did not know whether it was five minutes or fifty before the opening door let in a gust of cool air and warned him that he had arrived.

For a moment he had the hall to himself. It did not seem very large, but to gauge its true extent was difficult, because of the arches and the shadows. Shaded lamps on the tables gave a diffused but very subdued glow ; while a few unshaded lights, stuck about in the groining of the vault, consuming their energy in small patches of great brilliancy, dazzled rather than assisted the eye. The fact that the spaces between the vaulting-ribs were whitewashed seemed to increase the glare. It was curious and not altogether happy, the contrast between the brilliance above and the murk below. No trophies of the chase adorned the walls ; no stags' heads or antlers, no rifles, javelins, tomahawks, assegais or krisses. Clearly the Verdews were not a family of sportsmen. In what did Randolph Verdew's interests lie ? Rintoul wondered, and he was walking across to the open grate, in whose large recess a log-fire flickered, when the sound of a footfall startled him. It came close, then died away completely, then still in the same rhythm began again. It was Rollo.

Rollo with his black moustaches, his swaggering gait,

his large expansive air, his noisy benevolence. He grasped Jimmy's hand.

But before he could say more than "Damned glad," a footman appeared. He came so close to Jimmy and Rollo that the flow of the latter's eloquence was checked.

"Mr. Rintoul is in the pink room," announced the footman.

Rollo put his little finger in his mouth and gently bit it.

"Oh, but I thought I said——"

"Yes, sir," interrupted the footman. "But Mr. Verdew thought he might disturb Mr. Rintoul in the onyx room, because sometimes when he lies awake at night he has to move about, as you know, sir. And he thought the pink room had a better view. So he gave orders for him to be put there, sir."

The footman finished on a tranquil note and turned to go. But Rollo flushed faintly and seemed put out.

"I thought it would have been company for you having my brother next door," he said. "But he's arranged otherwise, so it can't be helped. Shall I take you to the room now, or will you have a drink first? That is, if I can find it," he muttered. "They have a monstrous habit of sometimes taking the drinks away when Randolph has gone to bed. And by the way, he asked me to make his excuses to you. He was feeling rather tired. My wife's gone, too. She always turns in early here; she says there's nothing to do at Verdew. But, my God, there's a lot that wants doing, as I often tell her. This way."

Though they found the whisky and soda in the drawing-room, Rollo still seemed a little crestfallen and depressed; but Jimmy's spirits, which sometimes suffered from the excessive buoyancy of his neighbour's, began to rise. The chair was comfortable; the room, though glimpses of stone showed alongside the tapestries, was more habitable

and less ecclesiastical than the hall. In front of him was an uncurtained window through which he could see, swaying their heads as though bent on some ghostly conference, a cluster of white roses. I'm going to enjoy myself here, he thought.

Whatever the charms of the onyx room, whatever virtue resided in the proximity of Mr. Randolph Verdew, one thing was certain : the pink room had a splendid view. Leaning out of his window the next morning Jimmy feasted his eyes on it. Directly below him was the moat, clear and apparently deep. Below that again was the steep conical hill on which the Castle stood, its side intersected by corkscrew paths and level terraces. Below and beyond, undulating ground led the eye onwards and upwards to where, almost on the horizon, glittered and shone the silver of the estuary. Of the Castle were visible only the round wall of Jimmy's tower, and a wing of the Tudor period, the gables of which rose to the level of his bedroom window. It was half-past eight and he dressed quickly, meaning to make a little tour of the Castle precincts before his hosts appeared.

His intention, however, was only partially fulfilled, for on arriving in the hall he found the great door still shut, and fastened with a variety of locks and bolts, of antique design and as hard to open, it seemed, from within as from without. He had better fortune with a smaller door, and found himself on a level oblong stretch of grass, an island of green, bounded by the moat on the east and on the other sides by the Castle walls. There was a fountain in the middle. The sun shone down through the open end of the quadrangle, making the whole place a cave of light, flushing the warm stone of the Elizabethan wing to orange, and gilding the cold, pale mediæval stonework of the rest. Jimmy walked to the moat and tried to find, to right or left, a path leading to other parts of the building. But there was none. He turned round and saw Rollo standing in the doorway.

" Good-morning," called his host. " Already thinking out a plan of escape? "

Jimmy coloured slightly. The thought had been present in his mind, though not in the sense that Rollo seemed to mean it.

" You wouldn't find it very easy from here," remarked Rollo, whose cheerful humour the night seemed to have restored. " Because even if you swam the moat you couldn't get up the bank: it's too steep and too high."

Jimmy examined the further strand and realised that this was true.

" It would be prettier," Rollo continued, " and less canal-like, if the water came up to the top; but Randolph prefers it as it used to be. He likes to imagine we're living in a state of siege."

" He doesn't seem to keep any weapons for our defence," commented Jimmy. " No arquebuses or bows and arrows; no vats of molten lead."

" Oh, he wouldn't hurt anyone for the world," said Rollo. " That's one of his little fads. But it amuses him to look across to the river like one of the first Verdews and feel that no one can get in without his leave."

" Or out either, I suppose," suggested Jimmy.

" Well," remarked Rollo, " some day I'll show you a way of getting out. But now come along and look at the view from the other side; we have to go through the house to see it."

They walked across the hall, where the servants were laying the breakfast-table, to a door at the end of a long narrow passage. But it was locked. " Hodgson! " shouted Rollo.

A footman came up.

" Will you open this door, please? " said Rollo. Jimmy expected him to be angry, but there was only a muffled irritation in his voice. At his leisure the footman produced the key and let them through.

" That's what comes of living in someone else's

house," fumed Rollo, once they were out of earshot. "These lazy devils want waking up. Randolph's a damned sight too easy-going."

"Shall I see him at breakfast?" Jimmy enquired.

"I doubt it." Rollo picked up a stone, looked round, for some reason, at the Castle, and threw the pebble at a thrush, narrowly missing it. "He doesn't usually appear till lunch-time. He's interested in all sorts of philanthropical societies. He's always helping them to prevent something. He hasn't prevented you, though, you naughty fellow," he went on, stooping down and picking up from a stone several fragments of snails' shells. "This seems to be the thrushes' Tower Hill."

"He's fond of animals, then?" asked Jimmy.

"Fond, my boy?" repeated Rollo. "Fond is not the word. But we aren't vegetarians. Some day I'll explain all that. Come and have some bacon and eggs."

That evening in his bath, a large wooden structure like a giant's coffin, Jimmy reviewed the day, a delightful day. In the morning he had been taken round the Castle; it was not so large as it seemed from outside—it had to be smaller, the walls were so thick. And there were, of course, a great many rooms he wasn't shown, attics, cellars, and dungeons. One dungeon he had seen: but he felt sure that in a fortress of such pretensions there must be more than one. He couldn't quite get the "lie" of the place at present; he had his own way of finding his room, but he knew it wasn't the shortest way. The hall, which was like a Clapham Junction to the Castle's topographical system, still confused him. He knew the way out, because there was only one way, across a modernised drawbridge, and that made it simpler. He had crossed it to get at the woods below the Castle, where he had spent the afternoon, hunting for caterpillars. They had really left him alone—even severely alone! Neither of Rollo's wife nor his brother was there as yet any sign.

" But I shall see them at dinner," he thought, wrapping himself in an immense bath-towel.

The moment he saw Randolph Verdew, standing pensive in the drawing-room, he knew he would like him. He was an etherealised version of Rollo, taller and slighter. His hair was sprinkled with grey and he stooped a little. His cloudy blue eyes met Jimmy's with extraordinary frankness as he held out his hand, and apologised for his previous non-appearance.

" It is delightful to have you here," he added. " You are a naturalist, I believe."

His manner was formal but charming, infinitely reassuring.

" I am an entomologist," said Jimmy, smiling.

" Ah, I love to watch the butterflies fluttering about the flowers—and the moths, too, those big heavy fellows that come in of an evening and knock themselves about against the lights. I have often had to put as many as ten out of the window, and back they come—the deluded creatures. What a pity that their larvæ are harmful and in some cases have to be destroyed! But I expect you prefer to observe the rarer insects? "

" I'm hoping to catch sight of one or two rare ones while I'm here," answered Jimmy, with an uneasy sense of being disingenuous.

" I'm sure I hope you will," said Randolph Verdew, with so much feeling in his voice that Jimmy nearly smiled. " You must get Rollo to help you."

" Oh," said Jimmy. " Rollo!——"

" I hope you don't think Rollo indifferent to Nature? " asked his brother, with distress in his voice and an engaging simplicity of manner. " He has had rather a difficult life, as I expect you know. His affairs have kept him a great deal in towns and he has had little leisure—very little leisure."

" He must find it restful here," remarked Jimmy, again with the sense of being more tactful than truthful.

"I'm sure I hope he does. Rollo is a dear fellow; I wish he came here oftener. Unfortunately his wife does not care for the country, and Rollo himself is very much tied by his new employment—the motor business."

"Hasn't he been with Scorcher and Speedwell's long?"

"Oh no; poor Rollo, he is always trying his hand at something new. He ought to have been born a rich man instead of me"—Rudolph spread his hands out with a gesture of helplessness. "He could have done so much, whereas I—ah, here he comes. We were talking about you, Rollo."

"No scandal, I hope; no hitting a man when he's down?"

"Indeed, no. We were saying we hoped you would soon come into a fortune."

"Where do you think it's coming from?" demanded Rollo, screwing up his eyes as though the smoke from his cigarette had made them smart.

"Perhaps Vera could tell us," rejoined Randolph mildly, making his way to the table, though his brother's cigarette was still unfinished. "How is she, Rollo? I hoped she would feel sufficiently restored to make a fourth with us this evening."

"Still moping," said the husband. "Don't waste your pity on her. She'll be all right to-morrow."

They sat down to dinner.

The next day, or it might have been the day after, Jimmy was coming home to tea from the woods below the Castle. On either side of the path was a hayfield. They were mowing the hay. The mower was a new one, painted bright blue; the horse tossed its head up and down; the placid afternoon air was alive with country sounds, whirring, shouts, and clumping footfalls. The scene was full of an energy and gentleness that refreshed

the heart. Jimmy reached the white iron fence that divided the plain from the Castle mound and, with a sigh, set his feet upon the zig-zag path. For though the hill was only a couple of hundred feet high at most, the climb called for an effort he was never quite prepared to make. He was tramping with lowered head, conscious of each step, when a voice hailed him.

"Mr. Rintoul!"

It was a foreign voice, the *i*'s pronounced like *e*'s. He looked up and saw a woman, rather short and dark, and a stranger, watching him from the path above.

"You see I have come down to meet you," she said, advancing with short, brisk, but careful and unpractised steps. And she added, as he still continued to stare at her:

"Don't you know? I am Mrs. Verdew."

By this time she was at his side.

"How could I know?" he asked, laughing, and shaking the hand she was already holding out to him. All her gestures seemed to be quick and unpremeditated.

"Let us sit here," she said, and almost before she had spoken was sitting, and had made him sit, on the wooden bench beside them. "I am tired from walking down-hill; you will be tired by walking up-hill: therefore we both need a rest."

She decided it all so quickly that Jimmy, whose nature had a streak of obstinacy, wondered if he were really so tired after all.

"And who should I have been, who could I have been, but Mrs. Verdew?" she demanded challengingly.

Jimmy saw that an answer was expected, but couldn't think of anyone who Mrs. Verdew might have been.

"I don't know," he said feebly.

"Of course you don't, silly," said Mrs. Verdew. "How long have you been here?"

"I can't remember. Four or five days, I think,"

said Jimmy, who disliked being nailed down to a definite fact.

"Four *or* five days? Listen to the man, how vague he is!" commented Mrs. Verdew, with a gesture of impatience apostrophising the horizon. "Well, whether it's five days or only four, you must have learnt one thing—that no one enters these premises without leave."

"Premises?" murmured Jimmy.

"Hillside, garden, grounds—premises," repeated Mrs. Verdew. "How slow you are! But so are all Englishmen."

"I don't think Rollo is slow," remarked Jimmy, hoping to carry the war into her country.

"Sometimes too slow, sometimes too fast, never the right pace," pronounced his wife. "Rollo misdirects his life."

"He married you," said Jimmy gently.

Mrs. Verdew gave him a quick look. "That was partly because I wanted him to. But only just now, for instance, he has been foolish."

"Do you mean he was foolish to come here?"

"I didn't mean that. Though I hate the place, and he does no good here."

"What good could he do?" asked Jimmy, who was staring vacantly at the sky. "Except, perhaps, help his brother to look after—to look after——"

"That's just it," said Mrs. Verdew. "Randolph doesn't need any help, and if he did he wouldn't let Rollo help him. He wouldn't even have him made a director of the coal-mine!"

"What coal-mine?" Jimmy asked.

"Randolph's. You don't mean to say you didn't know he had a coal-mine? One has to tell you everything!"

"I like you to tell me things!" protested Jimmy.

"As you don't seem to find out anything for yourself, I suppose I must. Well, then: Randolph has a coal-

mine, he is very rich, and he spends his money on nothing but charitable societies for contradicting the Laws of Nature. And he won't give Rollo a penny—not a penny, though he is his only brother, his one near relation in the world! He won't even help him to get a job!"

"I thought he had a job," said Jimmy, in perplexity.

"You thought that! You'd think anything!" exclaimed Mrs. Verdew, her voice rising in exasperation.

"No, but he told me he came here for a holiday," said Jimmy pacifically.

"Holiday, indeed! A long holiday. I can't think why Rollo told you that. Nor can I think why I bore you with all our private troubles. A man can talk to a woman about anything; but a woman can only talk to a man about what interests him."

"But who is to decide that?"

"The woman, of course; and I see you're getting restless."

"No, no. I was so interested. Please go on."

"Certainly not. I am a Russian, and I often know when a man is bored sooner than he knows himself. Come along," pulling him from the bench much as a gardener uproots a weed; "and I will tell you something very interesting. Ah, how fast you walk! Don't you know it's less fatiguing to walk uphill slowly—and you with all those fishing-nets and pill-boxes. And what on earth is that great bottle for?"

"I try to catch butterflies in these," Jimmy explained. "And this is my killing-bottle."

"What a horrible name. What is it for?"

"I'm afraid I kill the butterflies with it."

"Ah, what a barbarian! Give it to me a moment. Yes, there are their corpses, poor darlings. Is that Randolph coming towards us? No, don't take it away. I can carry it quite easily under my shawl. What was I going to tell you when you interrupted me? I remember—it was about the terrace. When I first came here I used

to feel frightfully depressed—it was winter and the sun set so early, sometimes before lunch! In the afternoons I used to go down the mound, where I met you, and wait for the sun to dip below that bare hill on the left. And I would begin to walk quite slowly towards the Castle, and all the while the sun was balanced on the hill-top like a ball! And the shadow covered the valley and kept lapping my feet, like the oncoming tide! And I would wait till it reached my ankles, and then run up into the light, and be safe for a moment. It was such fun, but I don't expect you'd enjoy it, you're too sophisticated. Ah, here's Randolph. Randolph, I've been showing Mr. Rintoul the way home; he didn't know it—he doesn't know anything! Do you know what he does with this amusing net? He uses it to catch tiny little moths, like the ones that get into your furs. He puts it over them and looks at them, and they're so frightened, they think they can't get out; then they notice the little holes, and out they creep and fly away! Isn't it charming?"

"Charming," said Randolph, glancing away from the net and towards the ground.

"Now we must go on. We want our tea terribly!" And Mrs. Verdew swept Jimmy up the hill.

With good fortune the morning newspaper arrived at Verdew Castle in time for tea, already a little out of date. Jimmy accorded it, as a rule, the tepid interest with which, when abroad, one contemplates the English journals of two days ago. They seem to emphasise one's remoteness, not lessen it. Never did Jimmy seem further from England, indeed, further from civilisation, than when he picked up the familiar sheet of *The Times*. It was like a faint rumour of the world that had somehow found its way down hundreds of miles of railway, changed trains and stations, rumbled across the estuary and threaded the labyrinth of lanes and turnings between Verdew Grove and the Castle. Each day its news seemed

to grow less important, or at any rate less important to Jimmy. He began to turn over the leaves. Mrs. Verdew had gone to her room, absent-mindedly taking the killing-bottle with her. He was alone; there was no sound save the crackle of the sheets. Unusually insipid the news seemed. He turned more rapidly. What was this? In the middle of page fourteen, a hole? No, not a mere hole: a deliberate excision, an operation performed with scissors. What item of news could anyone have found worth reading, much less worth cutting out? To Jimmy's idle mind, the centre of page fourteen assumed a tremendous importance, it became the sun of his curiosity's universe. He rose; with quick cautious fingers he searched about, shifting papers, delving under blotters, even fumbling in the more public-looking pigeon-holes.

Suddenly he heard the click of a door opening, and with a bound he was in the middle of the room. It was only Rollo, whom business of some kind had kept all day away from home.

"Enter the tired bread-winner," he remarked. "Like to see the paper? I haven't had time to read it." He threw something at Jimmy and turned on his heel.

It was *The Times*. With feverish haste Jimmy turned to page fourteen and seemed to have read the paragraph even before he set eyes on it. It was headed:

"MYSTERIOUS OUTBREAK AT VERDEW

"The sequestered, little-known village of Verdew-le-Dale has again been the scene of a mysterious outrage, recalling the murders of John Didwell and Thomas Presland in 1910 and 1912, and the occasional killing of animals which has occurred since. In this instance, as in the others, the perpetrator of the crime seems to have been actuated by some vague motive of retributive justice. The victim was a shepherd-dog, the property of Mr. J. R. Cross. The dog, which was known to worry cats, had lately killed two belonging to an old woman of the parish. The Bench, of which Mr. Randolph Verdew is chairman, fined Cross and told him to

keep the dog under proper control, but did not order its destruction. Two days ago the animal was found dead in a ditch, with its throat cut. The police have no doubt that the wound was made by the same weapon that killed Didwell and Presland. who, it will be remembered, had both been prosecuted by the R.S.P.C.A. for cruelty and negligence resulting in the deaths of domestic animals. At present no evidence has come to light that might lead to the detection of the criminal, though the police are still making investigations."

"And I don't suppose it will ever come to light," Jimmy muttered.

"What do you suppose won't come to light? enquired a voice at his elbow. He looked up. Randolph Verdew was standing by his chair, and looking over his shoulder at the newspaper.

Jimmy pointed to the paragraph.

"Any clue to the identity of the man who did this."

"No," said Randolph after a perceptible pause. "I don't suppose it will." He hesitated a moment and then added:

"But it would interest me much to know how that paragraph found its way back into the paper."

Jimmy explained.

"You see," observed Randolph, "I always cut out, and paste into a book, any item of news that concerns the neighbourhood, and especially Verdew. In this way I have made an interesting collection."

"There seem to have been similar occurrences here before," remarked Jimmy.

"There have, there have," Randolph Verdew said.

"It's very strange that no one has even been suspected."

Randolph Verdew answered obliquely:

"Blood calls for blood. The workings of justice are secret and incalculable."

"Then you sympathise a little with the murderer?" Jimmy enquired.

"I?" muttered Randolph. "I think I hate cruelty more than anything in the world."

"But wasn't the murderer cruel?" persisted Jimmy.

"No," said Randolph Verdew with great decision. "At least," he added in a different tone, "the victims appear to have died with the minimum of suffering. But here comes Vera. We must find a more cheerful topic of conversation. Vera, my dear, you won't disappoint us of our bridge to-night?"

Three days elapsed, three days rendered slightly unsatisfactory for Jimmy from a trivial cause. He could not get back his killing-bottle from Mrs. Verdew. She had promised it, she had even gone upstairs to fetch it; but she never brought it down. Meanwhile, several fine specimens (in particular a large female Emperor moth) languished in match-boxes and other narrow receptacles, damaging their wings and even having to be set at liberty. It was very trying. He began to feel that the retention of the killing-bottle was deliberate. In questions of conduct he was often at sea. But in the domain of manners, though he sometimes went astray, he considered that he knew very well which road he ought to take, and the knowledge was a matter of pride to him. The thought of asking Mrs. Verdew a third time to restore his property irked him exceedingly. At last he screwed up his courage. They were walking down the hill together after tea.

"Mrs. Verdew," he began.

"Don't go on," she exclaimed. "I know exactly what you're going to say. Poor darling, he wants to have his killing-bottle back. Well, you can't. I need it myself for those horrible hairy moths that come in at night."

"But Mrs. Verdew——!" he protested.

"And please don't call me Mrs. Verdew. How long have we known each other? Ten days! And soon you've got to go! Surely you could call me Vera!"

Jimmy flushed. He knew that he must go soon, but didn't realise that a term had been set to his stay.

"Listen," she continued, beginning to lead him down the hill: "when you're in London I hope you'll often come to see us."

"I certainly will," said he.

"Well, then, let's make a date. Will you dine with us on the tenth? That's to-morrow week."

"I'm not quite sure——" began Jimmy unhappily, looking down on to the rolling plain and feeling that he loved it.

"How long you're going to stay?" broke in Mrs. Verdew, who seemed able to read his thoughts. "Why do you want to stay? There's nothing to do here: think what fun we might have in London. You can't like this place and I don't believe it's good for you; you don't look half as well as you did when you came."

"I feel very well," said Jimmy.

"Feeling is nothing," said Mrs. Verdew. "Look at me. Don't I look well?" She turned up to him her face: it was too large, he thought, and dull and pallid with powder; the features were too marked: but undeniably it had beauty. "I suppose I do: I feel well. But in this place I believe my life might stop any moment of its own accord! Do you never feel that?"

"No," said Jimmy, smiling.

"Sit down," she said suddenly, taking him to a seat as she had done on the occasion of their first meeting, "and let me have your hand—not because I love you, but because I'm happier holding something, and it's a pretty hand." Jimmy did not resist: he was slightly stupefied, but somehow not surprised by her behaviour. She held up his drooping hand by the wrist, level with her eyes, and surveyed it with a smile, then she laid it, palm upward, in her lap. The smile vanished from her face: she knitted her brows.

"I don't like it," she said, a sudden energy in her voice.

"I thought you said it was a pretty hand," murmured Jimmy.

"I did; you know I don't mean that. It *is* pretty: but you don't deserve to have it, nor your eyes, nor your hair; you are idle and complacent and unresponsive and ease-loving—you only think of your butterflies and your killing-bottle!" She looked at him fondly; and Jimmy, for some reason, was rather pleased to hear all this. "No, I meant that I see danger in your hand, in the lines."

"Danger to me?" murmured Jimmy.

"To whom else? Ah, God, the conceit of men! Yes, to you."

"What sort of danger—physical danger?" enquired Jimmy, only moderately interested.

"*Danger de mort*," pronounced Mrs. Verdew.

"Come, come," said Jimmy, bending forward and looking into Mrs. Verdew's face to see if she was pretending to be serious. "When does the danger threaten?"

"Now," said Mrs. Verdew.

Oh, thought Jimmy, what a tiresome woman! So you think I'm in danger, do you, Mrs. Verdew, of losing my head at this moment? God, the conceit of women! He stole a glance at her; she was looking straight ahead, her lips pursed up and trembling a little, as though she wanted him to kiss her. Shall I? he thought, for compliance was in his blood and he always wanted to do what was expected of him. But at that very moment a wave of irritability flooded his mind and changed it: she had taken his killing-bottle, spoilt and stultified four precious days, and all to gratify her caprice. He turned away.

"Oh, I'm tougher than you think," he said.

"Tougher?" she said. "Do you mean your skin? All Englishmen have thick skins." She spoke resentfully;

then her voice softened. "I was going to tell you——" She uttered the words with difficulty, and as though against her will. But Jimmy, not noticing her changed tone and still ridden by his irritation, interrupted her.

"That you'd restore my killing-bottle?"

"No, no," she cried in exasperation, leaping to her feet. "How you do harp on that wretched old poison bottle! I wish I'd broken it!" She caught her breath, and Jimmy rose too, facing her with distress and contrition in his eyes. But she was too angry to heed his change of mood. "It was something I wanted you to know—but you make things so difficult for me! I'll fetch you your bottle," she continued wildly, "since you're such a child as to need it! No, don't follow me; I'll have it sent to your room."

He looked up; she was gone, but a faint sound of sobbing disturbed the air behind her.

It was evening, several days later, and they were sitting at dinner. How Jimmy would miss these meals when he got back to London! For a night or two, after the scene with Mrs. Verdew, he had been uneasy under the enforced proximity which the dining-table brought; she looked at him reproachfully, spoke little, and when he sought occasions to apologise to her, she eluded them. She had never been alone with him since. She had, he knew, little control over her emotions, and perhaps her pride suffered. But her pique, or whatever it was, now seemed to have passed away. She looked lovely to-night and he realised he would miss her. Rollo's voice, when he began to speak, was like a commentary on his thoughts.

"Jimmy says he's got to leave us, Randolph," he said. "Back to the jolly old office."

"That is a great pity," said Randolph in his soft voice. "We shall miss him, shan't we, Vera?"

Mrs. Verdew said they would.

"All the same, these unpleasant facts have to be

faced," remarked Rollo. "That's why we were born. I'm afraid you've had a dull time, Jimmy, though you must have made the local flora and fauna sit up. Have you annexed any prize specimens from your raids upon the countryside?"

"I have got one or two good ones," said Jimmy with a reluctance that he partially attributed to modesty.

"By the way," said Rollo, pouring himself out a glass of port, for the servants had left the room, "I would like you to show Randolph that infernal machine of yours, Jimmy. Anything on the lines of a humane killer bucks the old chap up no end." He looked across at his brother, the ferocious cast of his features softened into an expression of fraternal solicitude.

After a moment's pause Randolph said: "I should be much interested to be shown Mr. Rintoul's invention."

"Oh, it's not my invention," said Jimmy, a little awkwardly.

"You'll forgive me disagreeing with you, Rollo," Mrs. Verdew, who had not spoken for some minutes, suddenly remarked. "I don't think it's worth Randolph's while looking at it. I don't think it would interest him a bit."

"How often have I told you, my darling," said Rollo, leaning across the corner of the table towards his wife, "not to contradict me? I keep a record of the times you agree with me: December, 1919, was the last."

"Sometimes I think that was a mistake," said Mrs. Verdew, rising in evident agitation, "for it was then I promised to marry you." She reached the door before Jimmy could open it for her.

"Ah, these ladies!" moralised Rollo, leaning back and closing his eyes. "What a dance the dear things lead us, with their temperaments." And he proceeded to enumerate examples of feminine caprice, until his brother proposed that they should adjourn to the bridge table.

The next morning Jimmy was surprised to find a note accompany his early-morning tea.

Dear Mr. Rintoul (it began), *since I mustn't say " Dear Jimmy."* (" I never said she mustn't," Jimmy thought.) *I know it isn't easy for any man, most of all an Englishman, to understand moods, but I do beg you to forgive my foolish outburst of a few days ago. I think it must have been the air or the lime in the water that made me* un po' nervosa, *as the Italians say. I know you prefer a life utterly flat and dull and even—it would kill me, but there ! I am sorry. You can't expect me to change,* à mon age ! *But anyhow try to forgive me.*

Yours,
Vera Verdew.

P.S.—I wouldn't trouble to show that bottle to Randolph. He has quite enough silly ideas in his head as it is.

What a nice letter, thought Jimmy drowsily. He had forgotten the killing-bottle. I won't show it to Randolph, Jimmy thought, unless he asks me.

But soon after breakfast a footman brought him a message : Mr. Verdew was in his room and would be glad to see the invention (the man's voice seemed to put the word into inverted commas) at Mr. Rintoul's convenience. " Well," reflected Jimmy, " if he's to see it working it must have something to work on." Aimlessly he strolled over the drawbridge and made his way, past blocks of crumbling wall, past grassy hummocks and hollows, to the terraces. They were gay with flowers ; and looked at from above, the lateral stripes and bunches of colour, succeeding each other to the bottom of the hill, had a peculiarly brilliant effect. What should he catch ? A dozen white butterflies presented themselves for the honour of exhibiting their death-agony to Mr.

Randolph Verdew, but Jimmy passed them by. His collector's pride demanded a nobler sacrifice. After twenty minutes' search he was rewarded; his net fell over a slightly battered but still recognisable specimen of the large Tortoiseshell butterfly. He put it in a pill-box and bore it away to the house. But as he went he was visited by a reluctance, never experienced by him before, to take the butterfly's life in such a public and cold-blooded fashion; it was not a good specimen, one that he could add to his collection; it was just cannon-fodder. The heat of the day, flickering visibly upwards from the turf and flowers, bemused his mind; all around was a buzzing and humming that seemed to liberate his thoughts from contact with the world and give them the intensity of sensations. So vivid was his vision, so flawless the inner quiet from which it sprang, that he came up with a start against his own bedroom door. The substance of his day-dream had been forgotten; but it had left its ambassador behind it—something that, whether apprehended by the mind as a colour, a taste, or a local inflammation, spoke with an insistent voice and always to the same purpose: "Don't show Randolph Verdew the butterfly; let it go, here, out of the window, and send him an apology."

For a few minutes, such was the force of this inward monitor, Jimmy did contemplate setting the butterfly at liberty. He was prone to sudden irrational scruples and impulses, and if there was nothing definite urging him the other way he often gave in to them. But in this case there was. Manners demanded that he should accede to his host's request; the rules of manners, of all rules in life, were the easiest to recognise and the most satisfactory to act upon. Not to go would clearly be a breach of manners.

"How kind of you," said Randolph, coming forward and shaking Jimmy's hand, a greeting that, between two

members of the same household, struck him as odd. "You have brought your invention with you?"

Jimmy saw that it was useless to disclaim the honour of its discovery. He unwrapped the bottle and handed it to Randolph.

Randolph carried it straight away to a high window, the sill of which was level with his eyes and above the top of Jimmy's head. He held the bottle up to the light. Oblong in shape and about the size of an ordinary jam-jar, it had a deep whitish pavement of plaster, pitted with brown furry holes like an over-ripe cheese. Resting on the plaster, billowing and coiling up to the glass stopper, stood a fat column of cotton-wool. The most striking thing about the bottle was the word POISON, printed in large, loving characters on a label stuck to the outside.

"May I release the stopper?" asked Randolph at length.

"You may," said Jimmy, "but a whiff of the stuff is all you want."

Randolph stared meditatively into the depths of the bottle. "A rather agreeable odour," he said. "But how small the bottle is. I had figured it to myself as something very much larger."

"Larger?" echoed Jimmy. "Oh no, this is quite big enough for me. I don't need a mausoleum."

"But I was under the impression," Randolph Verdew remarked, still fingering the bottle, "that you used it to destroy pests."

"If you call butterflies pests," said Jimmy, smiling.

"I am afraid that some of them must undeniably be included in that category," pronounced Mr. Verdew, his voice edged with a melancholy decisiveness. "The cabbage butterfly, for instance. And it is, of course, only the admittedly noxious insects that need to be destroyed."

"All insects are more or less harmful," Jimmy said.

Randolph Verdew passed his hand over his brow. The

shadow of a painful thought crossed his face, and he murmured uncertainly :

" I think that's a quibble. There are categories. . . I have been at some pains to draw them up. . . . The list of destructive lepidoptera is large, too large. . . . That is why I imagined your lethal chamber would be a vessel of considerable extent, possibly large enough to admit a man, and its use attended by some danger to an unpractised exponent."

" Well," said Jimmy, " there's enough poison here to account for half a town. But let me show you how it works." And he took the pill-box from his pocket. Shabby, battered and cowed, the butterfly stood motionless, its wings closed and upright.

" Now," said Jimmy, " you'll see."

The butterfly was already between his fingers and half-way to the bottle when he heard, faint but clear, the sound of a cry. It was two-syllabled, like the interval of the cuckoo's call inverted, and might have been his own name.

" Listen ! " he exclaimed. " What was that ? It sounded like Mrs. Verdew's voice." His swiftly-turning head almost collided with his host's chin, so near had the latter drawn to watch the operation, and chased the tail-end of a curious look from Randolph Verdew's face.

" It's nothing," he said. " Go on."

Alas, alas, for the experiment in humane slaughter ! The butterfly must have been stronger than it looked ; the power of the killing-bottle had no doubt declined with frequent usage. Up and down, round and round flew the butterfly ; its frantic flutterings could be heard through the thick walls of its glass prison. It clung to the cotton-wool, pressed itself into corners, its straining, delicate tongue coiling and uncoiling in the effort to suck in a breath of living air. Now it was weakening. It fell from the cotton-wool and lay with its back on the plaster slab. It jolted itself up and down and, when strength

for this movement failed, it clawed the air with its thin legs as though pedalling an imaginary bicycle. Suddenly, with a violent spasm, it gave birth to a thick cluster of yellowish eggs. Its body twitched once or twice and at last lay still.

Jimmy shrugged his shoulders in annoyance and turned to his host. The look of horrified excitement, whose vanishing vestige he had seen a moment before, lay full and undisguised upon Randolph Verdew's face. He only said :

" Of what flower or vegetable is that dead butterfly the parasite ? "

" Oh, poor thing," said Jimmy carelessly, " it's rather a rarity. Its caterpillar may have eaten an elm-leaf or two—nothing more. It's too scarce to be a pest. It's fond of gardens and frequented places, the book says—rather sociable, like a robin."

" It could not be described as injurious to human life ? "

" Oh no. It's a collector's specimen really. Only this is too damaged to be any good."

" Thank you for letting me see the machine in operation," said Randolph Verdew, going to his desk and sitting down. Jimmy found his silence a little embarrassing. He packed up the bottle and made a rather awkward, self-conscious exit.

The four bedroom-candles always stood, their silver flashing agreeably, cheek by jowl with the whisky decanter and the hot-water kettle and the soda. Now, the others having retired, there were only two, one of which (somewhat wastefully, for he still had a half-empty glass in his left hand) Rollo was lighting.

" My dear fellow," he was saying to Jimmy, " I'm sorry you think the new model insecticide fell a bit flat. But Randolph's like that, you know : damned undemonstrative cove, I must say, though he's my own brother."

"He wasn't exactly undemonstrative," answered Jimmy, perplexity written on his face.

"No, rather like an iceberg hitting you amidships," said his friend. "Doesn't make a fuss, but you feel it all the same. But don't you worry, Jimmy: I happen to know that he enjoyed your show. Fact is, he told me so." He gulped down some whisky.

"I'm relieved," said Jimmy, and he obviously spoke the truth. "I've only one more whole day here, and I should be sorry if I'd hurt his feelings."

"Yes, and I'm afraid you'll have to spend it with him alone," said Rollo, compunction colouring his voice. "I was coming to that. Fact is, Vera and I have unexpectedly got to go away to-morrow for the day." He paused; a footman entered and began walking uncertainly about the room. "Now, Jimmy," he went on, "be a good chap and stay on a couple of days more. You do keep us from the blues so. That's all right, Williams, we don't want anything," he remarked parenthetically to the footman's retreating figure. "I haven't mentioned it to Randolph, but he'd be absolutely charmed if you'd grace our humble dwelling a little longer. You needn't tell anyone anything: just stay, and we shall be back the day after to-morrow. It's hellish that we've got to go, but you know this bread-winning business: it's the early bird that catches the worm. And talking of that, we have to depart at cock-crow. I may not see you again—that is, unless you stay, as I hope you will. Just send a wire to the old blighter who works with you and tell him to go to blazes."

"Well," said Jimmy, delighted by the prospect, "you certainly do tempt me."

"Then fall, my lad," said Rollo, catching him a heavy blow between the shoulder-blades. "I shan't say good-bye, but 'au revoir.' Don't go to bed sober; have another drink."

But Jimmy declined. The flickering candles lighted them across the hall and up the stone stairs.

And it's lucky I have a candle, thought Jimmy, trying in vain the third and last switch, the one on the reading-lamp by the bed. The familiar room seemed to have changed, to be closing hungrily, with a vast black embrace, upon the nimbus of thin clear dusk that shone about the candle. He walked uneasily up and down, drew a curtain and let in a ray of moonlight. But the silver gleam crippled the candle-light without adding any radiance of its own, so he shut it out. This window must be closed, thought Jimmy, that opens on to the parapet, for I really couldn't deal with a stray cat in this localised twilight. He opened instead a window that gave on to the sheer wall. Even after the ritual of tooth-cleaning he was still restless and dissatisfied, so after a turn or two he knelt by the bed and said his prayers—whether from devotion or superstition he couldn't tell: he only knew that he wanted to say them.

"Come in!" he called next morning, in answer to the footman's knock.

"I can't come in, sir," said a muffled voice. "The door's locked."

How on earth had that happened? Then Jimmy remembered. As a child he always locked the door because he didn't like to be surprised saying his prayers. He must have done so last night, unconsciously. How queer! He felt full of self-congratulation—he didn't know why. "And—oh, Williams!" he called after the departing footman.

"Yes, sir?"

"The light's fused, or something. It wouldn't go on last night."

"Very good, sir."

Jimmy addressed himself to the tea. But what was this? Another note from Mrs. Verdew!

Dear Jimmy (he read),

You will forgive this impertinence, for I've got a piece of good news for you. In future, you won't again be able to say that women never help a man in his career!" (Jimmy was unaware of having said so.) *As you know, Rollo and I have to leave to-morrow morning. I don't suppose he told you why, because it's rather private. But he's embarking on a big undertaking that will mean an enormous amount of litigation! and lawyers' fees! Think of that!* (*Though I don't suppose you think of anything else.*) *I know he wants you to act for him: but to do so you positively MUST leave Verdew to-morrow. Make any excuse to Randolph; send yourself a telegram if you want to be specially polite: but you* must *catch the* 8.30 *p.m. to London. It's the chance of a lifetime!—of a life. You can get through to Rollo on the telephone next morning. Perhaps we could lunch together—or dine?* A bientôt, *therefore.*

Your friend,

Vera Verdew.

P.S.—I shall be furious if you don't come.

Jimmy pondered Mrs. Verdew's note, trying to read between its lines. One thing was clear: she had fallen in love with him. Jimmy smiled at the ceiling. She wanted to see him again, so soon, so soon! Jimmy smiled once more. She couldn't bear to wait an unnecessary day. How urgent women were! Jimmy smiled more indulgently. And, also, how exacting. Here was this cock-and-bull story, all about Rollo's "undertaking" which would give him, Jimmy, the chance of a lifetime! And because she was so impatient she expected him to believe it! Luncheon, indeed! Dinner! How could they meet for dinner, when Rollo was to be back at Verdew that same evening? In her haste she had not even troubled to make her dates credible. And then: "I shall be furious if you don't come." What an argument! What confidence in her own powers did not that

sentence imply! Let her be furious, then, as furious as she liked.

Her voice, just outside his door, interrupted his meditation.

"Only a moment, Rollo, it will only take me a moment!"

And Rollo's reply, spoken in a voice as urgent as hers, but louder:

"I tell you there isn't time: we shall miss the train."

He seemed to hustle her away downstairs, poor Vera. She had really been kind to Jimmy, in spite of her preposterous claims on his affection. He was glad he would see her again to-morrow . . . Verdew was so much nicer than London. . . . He began to doze.

On the way back from the woods there was a small low church with a square tower and two bells—the lower one both cracked and flat. You could see up into the belfry through the slats in the windows. Close by the church ran a stream, choked with green scum except where the cattle went down to drink, and crossed by a simple bridge of logs set side by side. Jimmy liked to stand on the bridge and listen to the unmelodious chime. No one heeded it, no one came to church, and it had gone sour and out of tune. It gave Jimmy an exquisite, slightly morbid sense of dereliction and decay, which he liked to savour in solitude; but this afternoon a rustic had got there first.

"Good-day," he said.

"Good-day," said Jimmy.

"You're from the Castle, I'm thinking?" the countryman surmised.

"Yes."

"And how do you find Mr. Verdew?"

"Which Mr. Verdew?"

"Why, the squire, of course."

"I think he's pretty well," said Jimmy.

"Ah, he may appear to be so," the labourer observed; "but them as has eyes to see and ears to hear, knows different."

"Isn't he a good landlord?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes," said the old man. "He's a tolerable good landlord. It isn't that." He seemed to relish his mysteriousness.

"You like Mr. Rollo Verdew better?" suggested Jimmy.

"I wouldn't care to say that, sir. He's a wild one, Mr. Rollo."

"Well, anyhow, Mr. Randolph Verdew isn't wild."

"Don't you be too sure, sir."

"I've never seen him so."

"There's not many that have. And those that have—some won't tell what they saw and some can't."

"Why won't they?"

"Because it's not their interest to."

"And why can't the others?"

"Because they're dead."

There was a pause.

"How did they die?" asked Jimmy.

"That's not for me to say," the old man answered, closing his mouth like a trap. But this gesture, as Jimmy had already learned, was only part of his conversational technique. In a moment he began again:

"Did you ever hear of the Verdew Murders?"

"Something."

"Well, 'twasn't only dogs that was killed."

"I know."

"But they were all killed the same way."

"How?"

"With a knife," said the old man. "Like pigs. From ear to ear," he added, making an explanatory gesture; "from ear to ear." His voice became reminiscent. "Tom Presland was a friend o' mine. I seed him in the evening and he said, he says, 'That blamed donkey weren't worth a ten-pound fine.' And

I said, 'You're lucky not to be in prison,' for in case you don't know, sir, the Bench here don't mind fellows being a bit hasty with their animals, although Mr. Verdew is the chairman. I felt nigh killing the beast myself sometimes, it was that obstinate. 'But, Bill,' he says, 'I don't feel altogether comfortable when I remember what happened to Jack Didwell.' And sure enough he was found next morning in the ditch with his throat gapin' all white at the edges, just like poor old Jack. And the donkey was a contrary beast, that had stood many a knock before, harder than the one what killed him."

"And why is Mr. Verdew suspected?"

"Why, sir, the servants said he was in the Castle all night and must have been, because the bridge was drawed. But how do they know he had to use the bridge? Anyhow, George Wiscombe swears he saw him going through Nape's Spinney the night poor old Tom was done in. And Mr. Verdew has always been cruel fond of animals, that's another reason."

How easy it is, thought Jimmy, to lose one's reputation in the country!

"Tell me," he said, "how does Mr. Verdew satisfy his conscience when he eats animals and chickens, and when he has slugs and snails killed in the garden?"

"Ah, there you've hit it," said the old man, not at all nonplussed. "But they say Mr. Rollo Verdew has helped him to make a mighty great list of what may be killed and what mayn't, according as it's useful-like to human beings. And anybody kills anything, they persuade him it's harmful and down it goes on the black list. And if he don't see the thing done with his own eyes, or the chap isn't hauled up before the Bench, he doesn't take on about it. And in a week or less it's all gone from his mind. Jack and Tom were both killed within a few days of what they'd done becoming known; so was the collie dog what was found here a fortnight back."

"Here?" asked Jimmy.

"Close by where you're standing. Poor beast, it won't chase those b——y cats no more. It was in a mess. But, as I said, if what you've done's a week old, you're safe, in a manner of speaking."

"But why, if he's really dangerous," said Jimmy, impressed in spite of himself by the old man's tacit assumption of Randolph's guilt, "doesn't Mr. Rollo Verdew get him shut up?"

This simple question evoked the longest and most pregnant of his interlocutor's pauses. Surely, thought Jimmy, it will produce a monstrous birth, something to make Suspicion itself turn pale.

"Now don't you tell nothing of what I'm saying to you," said the old man at length. "But it's my belief that Mr. Rollo don't want his brother shut up; no, nor thought to be mad. And why? Because if people know he's mad, and he goes and does another murder, they'll just pop him in the lunatic asylum and all his money will go to Government and charity. But if he does a murder like you or me, and the circumstances are circumstantial, he'll be hanged for it, and all the money and the Castle and the coal-mine will go into the pockets of Mr. Rollo."

"I see," said Jimmy. "It sounds very simple."

"I'm not swearing there's anything of the sort in Mr. Rollo's mind," said the old man. "But that's the way I should look at it if I was him. Now I must be getting along. Good-night, sir."

"Good-night."

Of course it wasn't really night, only tea-time, five o'clock; but he and his acquaintance would meet no more that day, so perhaps the man was right to say good-night. Jimmy's thoughts, as he worked his way up the Castle mound, were unclear and rather painful. He didn't believe a tithe of what the old man said. It was not even a distortion of the truth; it was an ignorant and vulgar

slander, that had no relation to the truth except by a kind of contiguity. But it infected his mood and gave a disagreeable direction to his thoughts. He was lonely; Randolph had not appeared at lunch, and he missed Rollo, and even more he missed (though this surprised him) Rollo's wife. He hadn't seen much of them, but suddenly he felt the need of their company. But goodness knows where they are, thought Jimmy; I can't even telephone to them. In the midst of these uneasy reflections he reached his bedroom door. Walking in, he could not for a moment understand why the place looked so strange. Then he realised: it was empty. All his things had been cleared out of it.

"Evidently," thought Jimmy, "they've mistaken the day I was going away, and packed me!" An extraordinary sensation of relief surged up into his heart. Since his luggage was nowhere to be seen, it must have been stacked in the hall, ready for his departure by the evening train. Picturing himself already at the *guichet* of Verdew Grove station buying a ticket for London, Jimmy started for the hall.

Williams cut short his search.

"Were you looking for your things, sir?" he asked, with a slight smile. "Because they're in the onyx room. We've moved you, sir."

"Oh," said Jimmy, following in the footman's wake. "Why?"

"It was Mr. Verdew's orders, sir. I told him the light was fused in your bedroom, so he said to move you into the onyx room."

"The room next his?"

"That's right, sir."

"Couldn't the fuse be mended?"

"I don't think it was the fuse, sir."

"Oh, I thought you said it was."

So this was the onyx room. Certainly its colours were dark and lustrous and laid on in layers, but Jimmy

didn't care for them. Even the ceiling was parti-coloured. Someone must have been given a free hand here; perhaps Vera had done the decoration. The most beautiful thing in the room was the Chinese screen masking the door that communicated, he supposed, with Randolph's bedroom. What a clatter it would make if it fell, thought Jimmy, studying the heavy, dark, dully-shining panels of the screen. The door opening would knock it over. He heard the footman's voice.

"Is it for one night or more, sir? I've packed up some of your things."

"I'm not sure yet," said Jimmy. "Williams, will this screen move?"

The footman took hold of the screen with both hands and telescoped it against his chest. There was revealed an ordinary-looking door covered with green baize. Jimmy could see the point of a key-head, so the door was probably not very thick.

"This used to be the dressing-room," Williams volunteered, as though making a contribution to Jimmy's unspoken thoughts.

"Thank you," said Jimmy, "and would you mind putting that screen back? . . . And, Williams!"

The footman stopped.

"There's still time to send a telegram?"

"Oh yes, sir. There's a form here."

All through his solitary tea Jimmy debated with himself as to whether he should send the telegram—a telegram of recall, of course, it would be. The message presented no difficulty. "Wire if Croxford case opens Tuesday." He knew that it did, but his attendance was not at all necessary. He was undoubtedly suffering from a slight attack of nerves; and nowadays one didn't defy nerves, one yielded to them gracefully. "I know that if I stay I shall have a bad night," he thought; "I might as well spend it in the train." But of course he hadn't meant to go at all; he had even promised Rollo to stay. He had

wanted to stay. And in a sense he still meant, he still wanted to stay. To leave abruptly to-night would be doubly rude: rude to Randolph, rude to Rollo. Vera alone would be pleased. Vera, whose clumsy attempt to lure him to London he had so easily seen through. Vera, whose "I shall be furious if you don't come" rankled whenever he thought of it. Every moment added its quota to the incubus of indecision that paralysed his mind. Manners, duty, wishes, fears, all were contradictory, all pulled in different directions. A gust of apprehension sent him hot-foot to the writing-table. The telegram was ready written when, equally strong, an access of self-respect came and made him tear it up. At last he had an idea. At six o'clock he would send the telegram; the office might still be open. There would still be time to get a reply. If, in spite of this twofold obstacle he had an answer, he would take it as the voice of Fate, and leave that night. . . .

At half-past seven Williams came in to draw the curtains; he also brought a message. Mr. Verdew begged Mr. Rintoul to excuse him, but he felt a little unwell, and was dining in his own room. He hoped to see Mr. Rintoul to-morrow to say good-bye. "You are going, then, sir?" added the footman.

Jimmy blindfolded his will, and took an answer at random from among the tablets of his mind.

"Yes. And—Williams!" he called out.

"Sir?"

"I suppose it's too late now for me to get an answer to my telegram?"

"I'm afraid so, sir."

For a second Jimmy sunned himself in a warm glow of recovered self-esteem. Luck had saved him from a humiliating flight. Now his one regret was that his nerves had cheated him of those few extra days at Verdew. "If there had been a bolt on my side of the green door," he said to himself, "I should never have sent that telegram."

How like, in some ways, was the last evening to the first. As bedtime approached, he became acutely conscious of his surroundings—of the stone floors, the vaulted passages, the moat, the drawbridge—all those concrete signs which seemed to recall the past and substitute it for the present. He was completely isolated and immured; he could scarcely believe he would be back in the real, living world to-morrow. Another glass of whisky would bring the centuries better into line. It did; and, emboldened by its heady fumes, he inspected, with the aid of his candle (for the ground-floor lights had been turned out) the defences of door and window, and marvelled anew at their parade of clumsy strength. Why all these precautions when the moat remained, a flawless girdle of protection?

But was it flawless? Lying in bed, staring at the painted ceiling, with its squares and triangles and riot of geometrical designs, Jimmy smiled to remember how Rollo had once told him of a secret entrance, known only to him. He had promised to show it to Jimmy, but he had forgotten. A nice fellow, Rollo, but he didn't believe they would ever know each other much better. When dissimilar natures come together, the friendship ripens quickly, and as quickly falls. Rollo and Jimmy just tolerated each other—they didn't share their lives, their secrets, their secret passages. . . .

Jimmy was lying on his back, his head sunk on the brightly-lit pillow, his mind drowsier than his digestion. To his departing consciousness the ceiling looked like a great five of diamonds spread over his head; the scarlet lozenges moved on hinges, he knew that quite well, and as they moved they gave a glimpse of black and let in a draught. Soon there would be a head poking through them all, instead of through this near corner one, and that would be more symmetrical. But if I stand on the bed I can shut them; they will close with a click. If

only this one wasn't such a weight and didn't stick so. . . .

Jimmy awoke in a sweat, still staring at the ceiling. It heaved and writhed like a half-dead moth on the setting-board. But the walls stood still, so that there was something more than whisky at the back of it. And yet, when he looked again, peace had descended on the ceiling.

The dream was right; he could touch the ceiling by standing on the bed. But only with the tips of his fingers. What he needed was a bar of some kind with which to prise it open. He looked round the room, and could see nothing suitable but a towel-horse. But there were plenty of walking-sticks downstairs. To light his candle and put on his dressing-gown and slippers was the work of a moment. He reached the door in less time than it takes to tell. But he got no further, because the door was locked.

Jimmy's heart began to beat violently. Panic bubbled up in him like water in a syphon. He took a wild look round the room, ran to the bed-head, and pressed the bell-button as though he meant to flatten it in its socket. Relief stole into his heart. Already he heard in imagination the quick patter of feet in the corridor, the hurried, whispered explanations, the man's reassuring voice: "I'll be with you in a moment, sir." Already he felt slightly ashamed of his precipitate summons, and began to wonder how he should explain it away. The minutes passed, and nothing happened. He need not worry yet; it would take Williams some time to dress, and no doubt he had a long way to come. But Jimmy's returning anxiety cried out for some distraction, so he left the edge of the bed where he had been sitting, fetched the towel-horse, and, balancing unsteadily on the mattress, began to prod the ceiling. Down came little flakes and pellets of painted plaster; they littered the sheets and would be very uncomfortable to sleep on. . . . Jimmy stooped to flick them away, and saw from the tail of his eye that

since he rang five minutes had gone by. He resumed the muffled tattoo on the ceiling. Suddenly it gave; the red diamond shot upwards and fell back, revealing a patch of black and letting in a rush of cool air.

As, stupefied, Jimmy lowered his eyes, they fell upon the screen. It was moving stealthily outwards, toppling into the room. Already he could see a thin strip of the green door. The screen swayed, paused, seemed to hang by a hair. Then, its leaves collapsing inwards upon each other, it fell with a great crash upon the floor. In the opening stood Randolph, fully dressed; he had a revolver in his right hand, and there was a knife between his teeth. It was curved and shining, and he looked as though he were taking a bite out of the new moon.

The shot missed Jimmy's swaying legs, the knife only grazed his ankle, and he was safe in the darkness of the attic, with the bolt of the trap-door securely shut. He ran trembling in the direction the draught came from, and was rewarded first by a sense of decreasing darkness, and then by a glimpse, through a framed opening in the roof, of the stars and the night sky.

The opening was low down, and to climb out was easy. He found himself in a leaden gully, bounded on one side by a shallow parapet two feet high, and on the other, as it seemed, by the slope of the roof. Finding his way along the gully, he was brought up sharp against an octagonal turret, that clearly marked the end of the building. The moat was directly below him. Turning to the left, he encountered another similar turret, and turning to the left again he found himself up against a wall surmounted by tall chimneys. This wall appeared to be scored with projections and indentations—soot-doors he guessed them to be; he hoped to be able to use them to climb the wall, but they were awkwardly spaced, close to the parapet, and if he missed his footing he ran the risk of falling over its edge.

He now felt a curious lightheartedness, as though he had shuffled off every responsibility: responsibility towards his clothes, which were torn and dirty, towards his foot, which was bleeding, towards trains, letters, engagements—all the petty and important demands of life. Cold, but not unhappy, he sat down to await daybreak.

The clock had just chimed three-quarters, which three-quarters he did not know, when he heard a scraping sound that seemed to come from the corresponding parapet beyond the roof. He listened, crouching in the angle between the chimney wall and the battlement. His fears told him that the sound was following the track by which he had come; the shuffling grew indistinct, and then, the first turret passed, began to draw nearer. It could only be Randolph, who clearly had some means of access to the roof other than the trap-door in Jimmy's bedroom. He must have, or he could not have reached it to spy on his victim while he was asleep. Now he was turning the last corner. Jimmy acted quickly and with the courage of desperation. At the corner where he crouched there projected above the battlement three sides of an octagonal turret, repeating the design of the true turrets at the end. Grasping the stone as well as he could, he lowered himself into space. It was a terrible moment, but the cautious shuffle of Randolph's approach deadened his fear. His arms almost at their full stretch, he felt the dripstone underneath his feet. It seemed about six inches wide, with a downward curve, but it sufficed. He changed his grip from the plain stone band of the parapet to the pierced masonry beneath it, which afforded a better purchase, and held his breath. Randolph could not find him unless he leant right over the balustrade. This he never did. He muttered to himself; he climbed up to the apex of the roof; he examined the flue-doors, or whatever they were. All this Jimmy could clearly see through the quatrefoil to which he was clinging.

He heard Randolph say, " I shall find him when the light comes," and then he disappeared. The clock struck four, four-fifteen, four-thirty, and then a diffused pallor began to show itself in the eastern sky.

The numbness that had taken hold of Jimmy's body began to invade his mind, which grew dull and sleepy under the effort of compelling his tired hands to retain their hold. His back curved outwards, his head sank upon his breast ; the changes of which his cramped position admitted were too slight to afford his body relief. So that he could not at once look round when he heard close above his head the sound of an opening door and the sharp rattle of falling mortar. He recognised the figure as it passed him—Rollo's.

Jimmy restrained his impulse to call out. Why had Rollo come back? Why was he swaggering over the roofs of Verdew Castle at daybreak looking as though he owned it? It was not his yet. Rollo turned, and in the same leisurely fashion walked back towards Jimmy's corner. His face was set and pale, but there was triumph in his eyes, and cruelty, and the marks of many passions which his every-day exterior had concealed. Then his eyebrows went up, his chin quivered, and his underlip shot out and seemed to stretch across his face. " Just five minutes more, five minutes more ; I'll give him another five minutes," he kept muttering to himself. He leaned back against the wall. Jimmy could have touched the laces of his shoes, which were untied and dirty. " Poor old Jimmy, poor old James ! " Rollo suddenly chanted, in a voice that was very distinct, but quite unlike his own. To Jimmy's confused mind he seemed to be speaking of two different people. " He came to Verdew Castle, and left it all in "—he paused—" in flames. Never mind, Jimmy," he added in the conciliatory tone of one who, overcome by his better nature, at last gives up teasing. " Anyhow, it's ten to one against." He stumbled down the gully and round the bend.

Jimmy never knew how he summoned strength to climb over the parapet. He found himself sprawling in the gully, panting and faint. But he had caught sight of a gaping hole like a buttery-hatch amid the tangle of soot-doors, and he began to crawl towards it. He was trying to bring his stiff knee up to his good one when from close by his left ear he heard a terrible scream. It went shooting up, and seemed to make a glittering arc of sound in the half-lit sky. He also thought he heard the words, "Oh, God, Randolph, it's me!" but of this he was never certain. But through all the windings of Rollo's bolt-hole, until it discharged itself at the base of a ruined newell-staircase among the outbuildings, he still heard the agonised gasping, spasmodic, yet with a horrible rhythm of its own, that followed Rollo's scream. He locked the cracked, paintless door with the key that Rollo had left, and found himself among the lanes.

Late in the evening of the same day a policeman asked to see Mrs. Verdew, who was sitting in a bedroom in the King's Head inn at Fremby, a market town ten miles from Verdew Castle. She had been sitting there all day, getting up from time to time to glance at a slip of paper pinned to one of the pillows. It was dated "7.30 a.m., July 10th," and said, "Back in a couple of hours. Have to see a man about a car. Sorry.—ROLLO." She wouldn't believe the constable when he said that her husband had met with an accident, some time early that morning, probably about five o'clock. "But look; but look!" she cried. "See for yourself! It is his own handwriting! He says he went away at half-past seven. Why are all Englishmen so difficult to convince?"

"We have a statement from Mr. Randolph Verdew," said the policeman gently. "He said that he . . . he . . . he met Mr. Rollo at the Castle in the early hours of the morning."

"But how can you be so stupid!" cried Mrs. Verdew. "It wasn't Rollo—it was Mr. Rintoul who . . ."

"What name is that?" asked the policeman, taking out his note-book.

But Mrs. Verdew did not answer; she had fainted.

AN UNRECORDED INSTANCE

By Mrs. Belloc Lowndes

I

Hetty Mingle sat on an iron chair in a side path of the picturesque, rather overcrowded, public garden of that famous inland watering place, Lackston Spa. It was a beautiful July day, yet she felt, as she would have put it to herself, very lonesome, though she was living in a nice, well-furnished boarding-house, where she was only paying four guineas a week, with no extras.

One reason why Hetty Mingle felt unlike her generally placid self was that to-day was her birthday. She was thirty-three to-day; but she did not look her age. Apart from her somewhat thickset figure, she might have been in her early twenties.

A year ago her dear, clever, sharp-tongued mother had still been alive, and Hetty had had almost more to do than her poor brain could stand. Though they could well have afforded a nurse, Mrs. Mingle, who was an invalid, would only tolerate her daughter about her, and that though she would often cry crossly, "Why, I've never met such a butter-fingered soul as you are, my dear!"

Hetty had been frightened of her mother; sometimes deep in her heart she had rebelled against her, hurt, even angry on occasion, at being always treated as a child, never as a grown woman. But oh, how she missed her mother now! How strange, almost frightening, it was

to know—Hetty knew, rather than felt, things—that she hadn't a friend in the world except Mr. Quin, the old lawyer who paid her income quarterly, as had been her mother's wish, in the form of a cheque for a hundred and thirty-six pounds. This big cheque she, Hetty, at once always put into a local branch of the Midland Bank.

Just after her mother's death, eight months ago, over five hundred pounds a year had seemed to Hetty Mingle an enormous income—the sort of income one woman alone could surely never spend. But she knew better now. All the same, she sometimes told herself with satisfaction that she was indeed well situated in having no one to spend her money on but herself. Even so, to-day she certainly did feel curiously lonely.

Opening her scarlet leather bag—Hetty was fond of bright colours—she took out of it a thick envelope. As she read the superscription, tears welled up into her prominent china-blue eyes, for on the envelope was written: "For my daughter Hetty; to be opened and read immediately after my death."

Hetty Mingle hadn't looked at what was in that envelope for quite a long time, for as long, perhaps, as two months. But now, because it was her birthday, she thought she would like to read what was written there again. So she took out the three big sheets of paper, and read over her mother's last words, knitting her brows in her effort to understand everything quite clearly.

Though my illness has been a great trial to you, I know that you will miss me, Hetty. So I am writing down a number of things which will be a help to you after I am gone.

Lodgings will never be of any use to you, and hotels will be too expensive. So, to please me, I beg you always to try and live in some nice boarding-house situated in a healthy town. When you get tired of one place, you can easily move on to another.

I have always kept myself to myself, and I advise you, my dear, to do the same. The sort of people who try and make friends with other people generally end by wanting to get something out of them. You can be just pleasant and friendly, without ever being familiar.

Never you go and lend a penny of your money to anybody. If you feel sorry for someone, you give them a little present right out. Short reckonings make long friends. When in any money difficulty you go straight to Mr. Quin. But beware of troubling him too often. He doesn't like it.

Don't believe those silly folk who run down single life. Marriage isn't all it seems to be.

Now I hate to write what I'm going to put down here, my dear, but I've got to do it. You're not the sort of young person any man will ever like for herself.

If I didn't now know myself to be dying, I wouldn't write such a disagreeable thing. But that's the one thought that is worrying me, Hetty. I'm so afraid that some bad man will try and marry you for your money. I never taught you to tell untruths, and I don't like beginning to do it now; but if anyone is so impudent as to ask you about your money, you just say quietly that you've only got a small annuity. Those who ask no questions hear no lies.

I've had a hard life, Hetty, harder than I've ever let you know. I should like to believe what religious people say—but I don't. If, however, they do happen to be right, you may feel quite sure of one thing, that is, that, so far as she can, your mother will always watch over you.

Read over, now and again, all I've written down for you, my daughter. It's all true, if it isn't all pleasant.

Poor Hetty Mingle! Her mother's arid philosophy of life, long before her mother's death, had been constantly impressed on her. Yet, during the last few months, the words written on these three sheets of notepaper had saved her from several very real pitfalls, and of that fact she was vaguely aware.

The one thing she had just read which she did resent—and very, very much resent—were those curious, unkind words about no one wanting to marry her for herself! Already, as to that, her mother had been proved wrong, for five months ago a very nice gentleman had asked her to marry him. But he had been over thirty years older than herself, and she hadn't liked him at all. Still, he had been what her then landlady had called "very persistent," and, as a matter of fact, Hetty had left Bath, where they were both living in the same boarding-house, mainly because he worried her so.

"A very nice day, and not too warm for the time of year, isn't it?"

She turned round, surprised, to see that a pleasant, youngish-looking, fair man had drawn up a chair close to where she was sitting.

"I'm a stranger to this town," he went on, in a deep, caressing voice. "I wonder if you could tell me the location of the best picture palace in Lackston?"

Now Hetty Mingle did happen to know where there was a splendid picture palace. It stood just behind the boarding-house where she was staying. So, feeling rather pleased with herself, she tried to explain exactly where it was. Most questions left her without an answer.

"I can see that you've not come to this town to be cured of any ailment," observed the pleasant-spoken young man. "You look, if you'll excuse my saying so, remarkably healthy."

Hetty felt pleased, and she would have liked, but she had not a ready tongue, to answer his compliment by another; for he, too, with his chubby face, bright hazel eyes, and nice fair moustache, looked in the pink of condition, as the saying is. But instead of saying anything she suddenly burst out laughing, as she often did when she was pleased.

"I'm here on business," he said genially. "My

business is looking out for antiques. They're often to be picked up cheap in this sort of town."

"Fancy that!" she exclaimed.

"If you can put me on to anything of the sort—well, I'm prepared to pay you a very handsome commission for same."

Hetty was more used to people who wanted to be given money than to those who offer money, and her heart warmed to the speaker of those kindly words.

"Now, wherever you may happen to be, in rooms or an hotel, maybe——?"

He looked at her insinuatingly; but she only smiled foolishly.

"There may be some nice little bit of furniture—a lady's workbox, for instance. I mean the kind that has legs. Or perhaps a pretty painted chair or two?"

And then at last Hetty Mingle did think of something to say.

"There's nothing of the sort where I'm living," she said slowly, and there was real regret in her voice. "Of course, I haven't been into all the bedrooms, but it's a boarding-house——"

The stranger looked just a little disappointed. He had noticed that she was very nicely dressed, though in a rather old-fashioned way. Her gown was of good grey silk, and her black satin cloak was fastened with a real diamond brooch.

Hetty Mingle's long-dead father had been a jeweller.

"You find a boarding-house more comfortable and homely than an hotel, I expect?" observed the young man.

"I hate hotels," she exclaimed with sudden spirit. "You don't get the value for your money you ought to do in an hotel."

"Right!" he approved. "I'm beginning to see that you're a very sensible young lady."

Hetty bridled a little. It was pleasant to be called a sensible young lady. No one had ever called her that before.

As a matter of fact, the stranger took her for a widow.

"Do you often come out here—I mean into this garden?"

She gave a sudden loud laugh. "There isn't much else to do in the morning, is there, in a place like this?"

"Ever go to the Pictures?" he asked, leaning forward.

"I do, now and again."

She hesitated, for already she didn't want him to think her mean. "But good seats run away with a lot of money," she said.

"Would you think me presuming if I asked you to come with me to the Pictures to-morrow—I mean, of course, with me standing Sam?"

A look of real pleasure flashed into Hetty Mingle's stolid face. When a couple staying in her boarding-house asked her to go to the Pictures they always made her pay for herself, and once a young widowed lady, with whom she had foolishly made friends, had actually expected her to pay for them both!

In spite of her strict adhesion to her mother's advice concerning questions as to her income, Miss Mingle's fellow-boarders generally soon ended by forming a correct idea of her circumstances. So it was a delightful, as well as a novel, experience, to find someone, especially a nice young man, actually wanting to treat her to something.

Even so, she looked at him helplessly, wondering, in a muddled, anxious way, when and how they were to meet. She wouldn't for the world have allowed him to call for her at the boarding-house. Hetty hated and feared what her mother had always called "tittle-tattle," and she was painfully sensitive to any form of ridicule.

Meanwhile the stranger was looking at her very hard out of the corner of his eye.

"My name's Williams," he said; "Henry Williams."

He waited, and as she said nothing, he asked, again with that peculiarly ingratiating smile, " May I ask your name ? "

" My name "—she was a little taken aback by the question ; still, what could she do but answer it ?—" is Henrietta Mingle."

" Is it Miss—or is it Mrs.? "

" Miss, of course," and a silly smile quavered over her face.

At once he said, for he was the kind of man who always prefers to tell an untruth if it be equally convenient :

" Now then, that's funny ! I felt sure from the first that you were a single lady : "

" Are *you* married ? " asked Hetty inquisitively. She really felt she would like to know.

" Not me ! " he answered gaily, " though I've plenty with which to keep a wife—which is more than some chaps can say in these hard times. But I've never yet met the lady that I wanted to make Mrs. Williams."

She got up, and so did he. The garden had already begun to look solitary, for it was close on one o'clock.

" Shall we say here, to-morrow, at two ? " he asked abruptly. Without waiting for her flustered answer he went on : " Then we might go a little turn before the Pictures. There won't be any hurry, for I shall book our seats in advance."

Hetty never forgot that first afternoon with Henry Williams at the Pictures. She thinks of it, sometimes, even now. It was the first time, in her thirty-three years of life, that a man had ever held her hand. . . .

And thus began, in this casual, careless way, the one great adventure of Hetty Mingle's life. Day by day, evening by evening, her acquaintance with Henry Williams grew closer and closer, so close indeed that any other young woman would have felt no surprise when he

asked her, as he did at the end of a fortnight, to be his wife.

And yet, though she was so simple, poor Hetty was as cunning as only the very simple can be. Not a creature in the boarding-house where she was living had had a suspicion of what was going on. True, Miss Mingle was out a great deal, but then all the boarders were out a great deal, in the beautiful summer weather. And while the others went on long char-à-banc excursions, Hetty and her new friend spent their time in the old curiosity shops of the town, and in motoring round the villages near by, where now and again a good thing could be picked up cheap. So it was that when, sixteen days after their first meeting in the public garden of Lackston Spa, the two actually became engaged, Hetty assented eagerly to her lover's proposal that they should go south, and be married in Canterbury.

During those sixteen days Henry Williams had expended—and he kept a careful record of all his expenditure—twelve pounds, fourteen shillings, and sixpence, on his courtship of Hetty Mingle. In return she had told him everything there was to tell about herself; and, during a lightning visit to London, he had spent a very useful shilling at Somerset House.

One day, while he was cheerfully describing their joint future, he had observed: "On the day we're married, we shall each have to make a new will, my dear. I'll leave you everything I've got—quite a tidy little bit, I'm glad to say."

To his annoyed surprise, she had not made him the answer he had expected. But he had become accustomed to such omissions on her part. However, he had not supposed he would have any trouble with her, and neither had he. Immediately on leaving the little Canterbury church where they had been married—he had explained to her that it was much nicer and more respectable to be married in a church than at a registrar's office—they

had gone into a local lawyer's office, each to make a short will leaving to the other all of which he, or she, should die possessed.

Hetty's bridegroom had made her do something else on her wedding day, and, just a little to his surprise, she had jibbed—to use an expression to which Mr. Williams was partial. But in the end she had done what he asked, for by that time she was very much in love. Besides, had she not just promised to "obey" him? as he jokingly reminded her.

This which he made his newly-made wife do on her wedding day was to write a careful, though not a too intelligently worded, letter, acquainting the old solicitor, Mr. Quin, with the fact of her marriage to a gentleman named Williams, who dealt in antiques.

The bridegroom pondered carefully over the question of what address the bride should give Mr. Quin, the more so that they meant to move about a bit, before settling down. Then suddenly he exclaimed: "I must be getting dotty! You need only give him, my dear, the name of the bank here, in Canterbury, where you've just paid in his cheque. *We'll* have to keep in touch with the bank; and your old rascal of a lawyer,"—the speaker considered all lawyers rascals, as well as his own special enemies—"would find it out in any case, once his cheque was passed through."

II

Dr. Pomfret-Smith was the only medical man in the lovely Sussex village of Kidlingpoint. He liked the neighbourhood, and the neighbourhood liked him, but from a strictly professional point of view both the old-world hamlet, and the mushroom bungalow-town on the strip of shingle above the beach half a mile away, were almost unpleasantly healthy. Indeed, but for the fact that his delicate little wife had three hundred a year of

her own, they could never, as they sometimes smilingly told one another, have stuck it out!

As so often happened, the doctor was sitting after luncheon, on a very hot late August day, in the little study which was also his consulting-room, idly reading a book, when he was told that a Mr. Williams wished to see him. A moment later the visitor was shown into the room, looking, as a man is apt to look in such circumstances, just a little foolish.

Dr. Pomfret-Smith felt a twinge of disappointment; for Mr. Williams could only be described as extraordinarily ordinary. He was a fair, stocky man on the short side, and Pomfret-Smith, who prided himself, as doctors are apt to do, on his power of human diagnosis, told himself that here, surely, was a prosperous commercial traveller.

Mr. Williams looked—but this was a mere detail—very well indeed, a fact further proved by his first words, which were: "I've not come to consult you about myself. I've come to ask you just to see my wife, doctor. She doesn't seem quite the thing, and I'm a bit uneasy about her."

Dr. Pomfret-Smith insensibly thawed, for the stranger had an unexpectedly attractive voice.

"What's the matter with Mrs. Williams?" he asked kindly.

"She's been having awful headaches, and that seems quite wrong in a place like this! Also she turned a bit faint yesterday."

The doctor looked at the young man thoughtfully. "Perhaps she was doing too much before she came down here. I suppose you're just starting your holiday?"

A somewhat embarrassed smile came over Mr. Williams' face.

"Well," he said, "the truth is, doctor, we're still on our honeymoon. We were married at St. Olave's, in Canterbury, just three weeks ago."

"I see. Is she quite well, apart from these headaches? Cheerful, and so on?"

"Very cheerful," was the eager answer. "In fact, I had quite a job to make her come along and see you."

"Then she's here?"

"She's here, right enough. But I thought I'd better see you first."

The doctor felt just a little surprised when Mr. Williams brought his bride into the consulting-room. He had expected to see a nervous-looking girl, thin and sallow, wearing, maybe, very high heels, and one of those foolish little hats which give no shade. Instead, he saw before him a rather stoutly-built young woman who looked, as far as he could see, quite well. She was very plain, and her costume, a green coat and skirt, was very unbecoming; still, she had a good-humoured, kindly face, though her expression was just a little vacant.

"Well, Mrs. Williams, I hear you have not been well. Perhaps the sea has upset you? It does some people."

She began to laugh, "He! he! he!" as if he had said something very funny.

"I've often lived by the sea. Never did *me* any harm! Yet the last day or two I've just felt queer—I can't say more than that," and she began to laugh again.

"Perhaps your wife would like to see me alone, Mr. Williams?"

And then there came a great change over the woman standing there. A look of alarm, almost of suspicion, flashed over her large pink and white face. "Oh no!" she cried. "I'd rather my husband stayed with me."

The doctor gave an inward smile. His unspoken question was answered; she was evidently very fond of this young man; they were on excellent terms the one with the other.

"The sun's been very hot this last day or two. I expect you've been sitting out on the beach, and that you've simply got what I call a sun-headache. If you'll

wait a moment I'll give you something that I hope will do you good."

He made out a prescription for a soothing mixture, and handed it to his new patient's husband. "By the way, where are you staying?" he asked.

"We've taken the Old Bungalow for two months, sir."

"I'm sorry you've done that. It's such a funny, ramshackle place. Why, it hasn't even a bathroom! But then I suppose you bathe a lot in the sea?"

"Why, yes," the man smiled broadly. "We do do that, doctor. But all the same—as there's plenty of water laid on in the place, I'm hiring a bath, and having it moved in."

He turned to his wife. "Now then, Hetty. I think we left your parasol in the other room. Will you go and get it, my dear?"

She went off obediently, and then Mr. Williams turned to the doctor. "I'm very much obliged to you," he exclaimed. "I expect she'll be as right as a trivet to-morrow!" And, to the surprise of Dr. Pomfret-Smith, he laid a ten-shilling note on the table.

"I hope this is right, sir? Short reckonings make long friends!"

In spite of himself the medical man felt pleased. He knew only too well how difficult it was for him to collect small accounts, especially from those of his patients whom the Kidlingpoint folk called "our bungalow visitors."

"I'd like you to see my wife again, doctor, if she doesn't feel better this next day or two."

"I shall be delighted to see Mrs. Williams at any time," said Dr. Pomfret-Smith cordially. "If you don't want to come all the way to the village, you've only got to send me a message, and I'll cycle down to the Old Bungalow."

It was pleasant to have earned ten shillings in as many minutes, and with practically no trouble at all.

Four days later Hetty Williams, as she was now—though she couldn't get used to thinking of herself as that—was sitting on the verandah of the oddly-built Old Bungalow, which stood by itself, quite a way beyond the others.

She felt queerly lonely and depressed—no doubt because this was the first time her husband had left her since their wedding-day. And that wasn't all!

Something had altered her dear "hubby," as he had taught her to call him. It wasn't so much that he was unkind, as that he was no longer affectionate and "jolly." He had begun to change in his manner to her after that visit of theirs to the doctor. She wondered hazily, poor soul, whether she had offended him in any way. He had spent a long time, yesterday afternoon, writing a letter, and she had caught a glimpse of the address. It was to a Mrs. "Somebody"—she hadn't been able to see the name—in London, S.W., and it had made her feel vaguely jealous.

Then, this morning, he had suddenly told her that he had to go away for a night on business, and as he was going off, when she had put her arms round his neck, he had pushed her away roughly, with: "There, that'll do! Even new-married folk can't always be kissing and cuddling one another——"

Now Hetty could not have echoed the old philosopher who observed: "I think—therefore I am." Yet she was capable of very real mental pain and distress, and she was suffering, now, as she had never suffered before during her thirty-three years of life.

For one thing, the hundred and thirty odd pounds she had received just two days before her marriage was melting far too quickly.

Her husband had begun by making her draw out fifty pounds at the time she had gone to the bank to register her new signature. She had never drawn so big a cheque before, and it had made her feel quite nervous.

Also she had not quite liked his at once assuming the charge of her money. She had become used to keeping the little cash she thought it well to have in her possession, in a jewel-box of which she always wore the key round her neck.

All this being so, imagine her horrified astonishment when, twelve days after their marriage, Henry Williams had casually observed one morning that, as their "oof" was running out, she had better make out another cheque, this time for twenty pounds.

That suggestion had seriously upset her, and it had led to their first quarrel.

But in the end she had given him the cheque, although she had at first vehemently declared that nothing would make her do so! And then, a few days ago, he had made her draw yet another cheque, but this time she had understood the reason, for it was to pay half the rent in advance of this queer, ramshackle, funny looking bungalow, on the verandah of which she was now sitting, staring out at the dimpling blue sea with puzzled, anxious, red-rimmed eyes. . . .

All at once there fell on her ears the discordant peal of the loud, old-fashioned front-door bell of the bungalow. Why, who could it be? They didn't know anyone yet in this queer place.

Slowly she rose from the basket-chair, and, walking through into the central room, or hall, she opened the front door. Just outside was a cart and, standing on the half-made road, and right across the now open door, lay a huge white bath.

Now Hetty had secretly thought it a very silly thing of her hubby to want to have this kind of bath here. There was a big tin basin which the people who had been there before had found good enough. But Henry Williams had been set, from the first minute, as she now reminded herself crossly, on having a proper bath; and he had arranged to hire one for two months from the local plumber.

The plumber had very honestly pointed out to them that they would have a job emptying the bath, as there was nothing to take off the water. But the new tenant of the Old Bungalow had been quite sharp about it. "That's my business!" he had exclaimed. And then, laughingly, he had added, "I do like a nice drop of clean fresh water after I've had my dip in the sea!" And the plumber had answered, amiably enough, "Why, yes, sir; most people do, I fancy."

Three men were now standing on the narrow, stony, dusty road outside, and on Hetty's opening the door, one of them exclaimed in a truculent voice: "Well, now, missus—where are we to put this 'ere hobject? The gentleman said as it wasn't to be delivered till to-morrow; but we was coming down this way with the cart, so we brought it to-day. You see, it's a bit of a job, for it'll take us three men to move that bath into the 'ouse; but you won't forget us, on such a hot day as this?"

Now Hetty had no idea where her husband did wish this tiresome bath to be put. As a matter of fact there were two taps in the house, one in the kitchen, and one in a kind of scullery. But she knew it would be equally inconvenient to have the bath placed under either tap.

As she stood hesitating, and muttering half to herself, "I don't know where he does want it put," the most intelligent of the three men sized her up, as the saying is.

"Hadn't we better just put the bath in the hall? When your good gentleman is back, I'll send down two of our chaps to help to move it; 'tisn't as if there was stairs."

She nodded, and after they had put the bath in a corner of the hall, just opposite her own bedroom door, Hetty unwillingly produced a shilling.

As the three went off without thanking her, she felt just a little sorry she hadn't made it two shillings. But when she remembered how quickly her money was going, she reminded herself of an old proverb her mother had

been fond of quoting. This proverb runs, " Be just before you are generous."

About seven o'clock Henry Williams came home. He looked tired, cross, and, to her intense astonishment, and yes, horror, when he saw the place where the bath had been put, be began to swear furiously. Poor Hetty had not known there was such language in the world !

At last she began, timidly, to remonstrate ; and savagely he turned on her with a volley of oaths. Then, suddenly seeing how much he was scaring her, he pulled himself together.

" I'm not blaming you, my dear ! I'm cursing the —— fool who sent the thing here to-day, and his —— men who dared to leave it in such a place as that. Why, it stands to reason we want it where the other old tub stands, in the scullery—that's the place for a bath ! "

" I'm very sorry," she murmured, still shaking with fear. " I'll walk up to the village to-morrow morning, and get them to send two men down."

" You'll do nothing of the kind ! " he said sharply. " I'll get in a couple of chaps from off the beach, give 'em sixpence each, and lend a hand myself. That damned plumber 'ud go and charge quite a lot for sending his men here again."

III

It was ten o'clock that same evening, and Hetty felt, as she always did feel at night, overwhelmingly sleepy. Her husband had recovered his temper. Even so he had been unpleasantly sarcastic when she had confessed that she had no idea how something tasty could be made from what remained of the cold meat on which they had now lived for two days.

At last she said nervously, " Don't you think it's about time for bed, ducky ? "

He answered at once. "You go to bed, my dear. As for me, I'll go out for a turn and a cigar, before turning in."

He kissed her in a perfunctory way, and she went off into her room feeling happier.

Very early in their married life, in fact, the day after they were married, Henry Williams had explained to her that he couldn't sleep with anyone else in his bedroom, and since then they had always had separate rooms. In the hotels where they had stayed he had always taken, as a matter of course, the best of the two rooms, but here, to Hetty's grateful surprise, her husband had good-naturedly insisted that she should have the large bedroom overlooking the beach, and he the smaller one at the back.

To-night, after she had undressed, there suddenly came over her a most curious feeling. She felt that her dead mother was close to her, an invisible, while yet an almost palpable, presence. And the effect of this curious, disturbing, sensation was that it made her feel not only queerly frightened, but also most unwontedly wide awake.

Even so, she got into bed, and after what seemed to her a long while she went to sleep.

It may have been a few minutes, or it may have been an hour later, when all at once she awoke—awoke, or so it seemed to her, to hear her dead mother's voice saying what her mother had so often said in life: "Try and *think*, Hetty, child. Try and think for yourself, my dear."

She sat up, and then, to her great surprise, she saw a line of gleaming light beneath her door. The Old Bungalow, in common with all the other newer and smarter bungalows, had had the electric light put in last year.

Apart from that narrow line of light there was also, higher up, a shaft of diffused brilliance like that produced by the bull's-eye of a small lantern. Though it looked oddly eerie in the otherwise dark room, Hetty did not think it strange, for she knew what caused it. Her bedroom

door was made of cheap grained foreign wood, and one of the knots in the wood had gone, leaving a round hole.

The owner of the bungalow had pointed this fact out with a smile to Hetty, observing as he did so: "Anyone standing the other side of the door can see into this room through that hole, so my wife generally hangs a skirt, or something of the sort, on one of the hooks. That makes it quite O.K.!"

She told herself that her hubby had evidently left the light on by accident when he had come in and gone to bed. What a waste! She must get up and put it out, even at the risk of waking him, for, unlike herself, he was a very light sleeper. Slipping out of bed as quietly as she could, all at once she heard him moving about the hall.

What could he be doing there, at this time of night?

As is the case with all those poor humans dowered with Hetty's peculiar mentality, there was a cunning, as well as an inquisitive, streak in her nature. So instead of opening the door, as an ordinary woman would have done, and ordering her husband off, good-humouredly or otherwise, to bed, she crept across the room, and looked through the little round hole in the door.

And then, the sight which met her eyes was so extraordinary and unexpected that she nearly burst into a loud guffaw of laughter. Nearly, but not quite, for she felt very curious to see what it was that her hubby was going to do next.

What he was doing now was funny enough, for Henry Williams had taken off his outdoor shoes, and in his stockinged feet he was capering about on the floor of the hall with a most odd kind of expression on his fleshy face. It was just as if he were hugely enjoying some silly secret joke all to himself!

Suddenly he scampered over to the bath. Whatever was he going to do there? What queer creatures men were—what babies, after all! Several times Hetty had

heard people say that men were nothing more than grown-up children—but she had never believed it till to-night.

Her husband, with the quick agility of a monkey, swung himself over the side into the huge empty bath. Now he was sitting in it, of course fully dressed, his face convulsed with secret amusement.

He sat up. He lay half-down. He leapt about in the big white cavity. Once he so entirely disappeared under the rim that she could not see him at all from where she stood hidden, fascinated by his antics.

Then, all at once, he leapt out of the bath, and walking quickly over to the wall by the front door, he put out the electric light, and a moment later she heard the sound of his door shutting quietly.

Henry Williams was very nice to Hetty the next morning, nicer than he'd been since he had taken her to see the doctor.

They walked up to the village together, and went into several of the shops. At the butcher's he chaffed her so funnily about her ignorance of housekeeping, that the people who were in the shop laughed aloud. At last he waggishly exclaimed, "She's new to it, you know, my little wife is! Why, we've only been married about a fortnight." And he won the butcher's heart, too, by saying that he only liked English meat—no old dead stuff for him, even if it did come from Canterbury, New Zealand!

After they were back home again in the bungalow, he himself cooked the piece of undercut they had brought with them. Hetty was taken aback, she even felt mortified, to find how well her husband could cook.

"You'll find I can do most things, old girl," he said cheerfully, flattered by her surprise.

But after they had eaten their tasty little meal he suddenly exclaimed: "I'm afraid I'll have to go away again this afternoon, dearie. I've got to meet a man over

Horsham way, to look at an old sideboard they say was stolen out of a grand house fifty years ago."

"I did think you'd stay with me to-day," she said complainingly, and already on the brink of tears. "It's awful dull here, all by myself."

"Business must come first," he answered tartly. "But cheer up, old girl, and remember that care killed the cat! I shan't be gone long this time. We might have a dip in the sea when I come back, and I'll hot you up a nice bath to-night. Now you'll like that?"

"Well, yes," she said, wiping her eyes, "I *shall* like that. I always had a good look at the bathroom before going into a new boarding-house, for I do like a good hot bath once a week. But won't hotting the water give a lot of trouble?"

"Only trouble to me," he said gallantly. "And I'd do a good bit more for you than that, my dear! By the way, the lady who lives at the third bungalow from here, her name's Jones—good old name—is coming to see you to-day. I said you'd be in about three o'clock; I didn't think you'd want the bother of getting tea for her."

"I don't feel as if I want to see anyone," she said grumpily.

He replied sharply: "Nonsense! It's always a mistake not to get on with one's neighbours. And mind you give your hubby a good character," and this time he gave her a really affectionate kiss.

She smiled—it was a more intelligent smile than her usual smile, and he said quickly: "Hullo! What's the laugh about?"

"Only something that came into my head like."

She had remembered, suddenly, her husband's extraordinary antics of the night before; and long after he was gone she went on smiling to herself, and feeling happier than she had felt for several days.

Mrs. Jones duly came to call, and her coming further

cheered Hetty, for the good lady told her new neighbour all about the local politics. She explained that most of the "beachcombers," as they were styled, longed to organise some kind of co-operative arrangement about food. Such an arrangement would save such a lot on each woman's weekly bills, especially as the shopkeepers up in the village were such robbers.

Now this was a point that Hetty not only understood, but thoroughly appreciated as well; and she promised to enlist her husband's sympathy with the scheme, explaining proudly that Mr. Williams was a very clever business man.

Mrs. Jones stayed a long time at the Old Bungalow; perhaps she was hoping for a cup of tea, but if so, she was disappointed.

After she had gone, Hetty, who always found anything like a long-sustained conversation very tiring, lay back in one of the two wicker chairs on the verandah, and fell asleep.

And then, just as had been the case last night, she must have begun dreaming of her mother; for she awoke with a start to hear her mother's voice, again uttering words that had once been so familiar:

"Hetty, my dear! Be careful! Look where you're going, my child."

She stood up, feeling just a bit dazed, yet as if something were urging her footsteps to go indoors. Slowly she got up and yawned; then she pushed open the door which gave into the centre room of the bungalow.

Then she began to giggle, for the big white bath looked so odd, standing there in the further right-hand corner, without any proper taps, and with its squat iron feet still swathed in straw and paper.

A stronger breeze than usual was blowing in from the beach, and tiny wisps of straw were flying over the floor. Her face stiffened. It was too bad of those men not to have taken away all that stuff! Had she noticed this

omission on their part, she would not have given them that shilling.

Then Hetty told herself that there was one thing she could occupy herself in doing this dull afternoon—she could take all that nasty straw and old paper away.

Fetching a knife from the kitchen, she knelt down rather heavily on the boarded floor, and began sawing through the strong cords which bound the straw and paper round the nearest iron foot of the bath.

Though she was wide awake now, it was funny how curiously near to her her mother still seemed to be. It was an uncanny, disconcerting feeling. She had never felt that way in any of the boarding-houses she had lived in since her mother's death.

Now Mrs. Mingle, unlike Hetty, had been a great one for reading, and it gave Mrs. Mingle's daughter quite a turn when she saw that the big sheet of crumpled paper she had just unwound from the iron foot of the bath was part of an old *News of the World*, her mother's favourite paper.

She took it up, and smoothed it out flat on the floor.

And then, all at once, Hetty began to laugh aloud; though what was printed there, staring up at her, was really very sad, come to think of it!

BRIDE DIES IN HER BATH

Last Tuesday morning, at the Eastbourne Coroner's Court, there was opened an inquest on Mary Anne Love, the wife of George Love, who was found dead in her bath. The circumstances were peculiarly sad, for Mr. and Mrs. Love were only married three weeks ago. Dr. Pember, of 32, Marine Parade, gave evidence that he had attended deceased a week before her death. But she had only been slightly indisposed, and there had been nothing really wrong with her. He had made a post-mortem examination, and he could but conclude that she had turned faint in the water, and that, slipping down in the bath, her head had become immersed, and so she had been suffocated. Many women got into the way of taking a bath which was a great deal too hot.

Hetty told herself, grimacing foolishly, that she must be careful not to have *her* bath-water too hot to-night.

There came a sudden knock at the front door, and she pulled herself up by the edge of the bath on to her feet. She was curiously inactive and heavy for a woman of her age.

On opening the front door, she saw with surprise that the postman stood there. It was the first time he had called at the Old Bungalow since they had taken it.

"Mrs. Williams?" he said questioningly, and on her saying "Yes," he handed her an envelope. Then she saw, with a slight feeling of misgiving, that it was a letter from the lawyer, Mr. Quin, redirected on from the Canterbury bank.

But there was nothing to worry about, though Mr. Quin's typewritten letter was marked "Private"—Hetty couldn't think why.

The writer began by explaining that he had been away on a holiday. He expressed great surprise at the news of Hetty's marriage, and he concluded by saying that he hoped she would find it convenient to come to London soon, as he wished to see her concerning the re-investment of a small portion of her capital.

There came another sudden knock at the door, and this time, to Hetty's astonishment, it was a telegraph-boy who stood there.

"It can't be for here," she said crossly.

"Aren't you Mrs. Williams?" he asked. "If so, this is sure for you, ma'am."

She opened the telegram to find that it was from her husband, explaining that he had been detained, and that he couldn't be back till the next day.

By now poor Hetty felt really very upset and flustered. She told herself that this was too bad of her hubby! In fact, really unkind. She didn't feel at all like staying here all by herself to-night. She had never slept alone in a house in her life, and she wasn't going to begin now.

All at once she began to giggle again. She could play at that game as well as her hubby! Why shouldn't she go up to London this very afternoon? She knew of a nice boarding-house in Bayswater where they were always pleased to see her. She could see Mr. Quin to-morrow morning, and be back here in the afternoon, probably before her husband had arrived home.

Going into her bedroom, she looked at the contents of her purse. There were only thirty-five shillings there. Still, that was ample to take her to London, and provide her with a night's lodging, before seeing the lawyer.

Slowly Hetty put on her outdoor things, and then, all at once, she told herself that she must leave word she had gone, or her hubby might come back before her, after all. She was beginning, too, to feel just a little bit afraid that he might be angry at what she was going to do. Still, Mr. Quin was her own lawyer, and he wanted to see her about her own money.

All the same, she might as well write her hubby a nice letter—her very first letter to him, too—explaining about Mr. Quin, and, maybe, adding something to make him laugh! So, cutting out that funny little paragraph about the bride who had died in her bath, she took a piece of the cheap notepaper Williams always used, and on it she wrote, laboriously, in her big, childish hand:

Dear Henry,

I am going up to London just to see Mr. Quin. He wants to see me about my money. I'll be back to-morrow. Isn't this a funny bit I've cut out of an old paper? Having that bath here makes me think of it.

Your affectionate wife,
Henrietta Williams.

She put the letter and the cutting into an envelope and, addressing it to "Mr. Williams," she left it on the hall

table, which she dragged into the middle of the room, so that he couldn't miss seeing it.

Then she opened the front door, and passing through it, put the key under the mat. Her hubby had taught her to do that the first day they had come here.

Hetty's interview with Mr. Quin the next morning was, on the whole, quite satisfactory. He hadn't much to say, after all, though he did scold her somewhat for not having let him know, before it took place, about her marriage. As for the business he had wanted to see her about, it was only to put her new name to a mortgage.

But no one was more surprised than Mr. Quin—not even Hetty herself—at what happened, when she went back home that same afternoon!

Astounding to relate, Hetty, on reaching Kidlingpoint, found the Old Bungalow shut up, and her husband gone.

She soon, however, learnt what had happened.

After coming back that morning, Mr. Williams, it seems, had locked up the bungalow, taking, oddly enough, his wife's little bits of rather valuable jewellery along with him.

Then he had gone all round the village, leaving word with the various tradesmen, as well as the house-agent, that when Mrs. Williams came back from town she would pay up everything, and follow him. He also found time to have the bath moved back to the plumber's shop.

But though she did pay up everything, even, on Mr. Quin's advice, to the extra month's tenancy of the Old Bungalow, Hetty found it impossible to follow her husband, owing to the simple, though singular, fact that he had left no address.

Much surprised and distressed, poor Hetty, again owing to Mr. Quin's advice, had costly advertisements inserted in the agony columns of all the daily papers. But they brought no news, either of him, or from him, and after a time, for a very good reason—not unconnected

with a certain trial at the Old Bailey—which Mr. Quin did not think it necessary to impart to his client, the old lawyer recommended that she should drop the name of Williams, and call herself Mrs. Mingle, her dear mother's name.

And so it is as Mrs. Mingle that Hetty is leading a placid life, first in one nice boarding-house, and then in another, keeping herself to herself. The memory of her great adventure becomes fainter and fainter as time goes on; but she does feel it to be a source of solid satisfaction that she is now known as Mrs., and not as Miss, Mingle.

A CONSIDERABLE MURDER

By Barry Pain

Mr. Albert Trusworth Mackinder, having made much money in the City of London, retired to a house by the sea at Helmstone. He was at this time a widower of fifty-eight and he was accompanied by his only daughter, Elsa, a pretty child of sixteen. Mr. Mackinder was satisfactory to the local society and was not displeased with it himself. But he had had many ideas in his life, and the idea which possessed him most strongly at present was that he was interested in the onward march of science. For this reason he interested himself deeply in Dr. Bruce Perthwell. Dr. Perthwell attended Miss Mackinder once and Mr. Mackinder twice—on all three occasions for colds. When Dr. Perthwell recommended that they should stay in bed, feed light, and take the medicine which he would send up to the house, results had been satisfactory on each occasion. But this did not impress Mr. Mackinder nearly so much as the way in which Dr. Perthwell spoke of the mysteries and magic of science. Dr. Perthwell was a clean-shaven man, grey-haired, with an authoritative face and a very convincing manner.

Mr. Mackinder liked him and asked him to dinner frequently, for though Mr. Mackinder knew that it was too late in life for him to take up any really serious study of science, he was quite glad to have such scientific facts as Dr. Perthwell might be disposed to let drop, duly prepared and seasoned to suit the appetite of the elderly. In this way Mr. Mackinder learnt what was, roughly

speaking, the velocity of light, and, if he happened to require Vitamin C, in what articles of diet he would do best to search for it. This was all very good for Mr. Mackinder and kept him up in his belief that the world was an interesting place.

Now it happened that Elsa Mackinder invited to stay with her a friend to whom she had been long attached, Miss Jessie Palkinshaw, of the same age as herself and destined for the nursing profession. On the night of her arrival Mr. Mackinder, to square the table, invited Dr. Perthwell to join them at dinner, which he did. Dr. Perthwell got, perhaps, a little tired of preaching extreme moderation and temperance all day, and liked to relax a little in the evening. Mr. Mackinder's dinners were good. His cellar was good. There was no intolerable excess, but Mr. Mackinder and his guest generally, as is sometimes said, did themselves fairly well. It was after the two ladies had retired to the drawing-room that Mr. Mackinder refilled Dr. Perthwell's glass with '96 and addressed himself to a subject which had been somewhat in his mind that day.

"You know, Doctor, I was reading that murder case in the papers this morning. It puzzles me. Why do those poison people always bungle it? Why do they choose poison such as arsenic which can so easily be traced?"

Dr. Perthwell fixed his meditative eyes on the ceiling.

"I should say it is principally from ignorance. No doctor, of course, would make such a blunder. But not even every doctor, not by a long way, knows what is actually possible."

"And what is actually possible?" asked Mr. Mackinder eagerly.

"Well," said Dr. Perthwell, "there are two drugs which can be procured at any chemist's without any formalities, and neither of them is in the least degree injurious. But if you mix, say, a quarter of a teaspoonful of one with a quarter of a teaspoonful of the other and

give that in a glass of water to any person, in less than an hour that person will be dead. And no post-mortem, no examination of any kind will ever find the slightest trace of poison in the body."

"Amazing," said Mr. Mackinder. "Perfectly amazing. That really is so?"

"It is."

"I suppose I shouldn't ask it," said Mr. Mackinder, "but could you tell me what the names of these two drugs are?"

"Undoubtedly I could," said the doctor, "but——"

Mr. Mackinder refilled the doctor's glass.

"After all," said Dr. Perthwell, "you are a student of science. You are no ordinary layman. I have no doubt that your interest is quite legitimate. Would you be willing to swear to me on your word of honour that you have no intention of murdering anybody, and that if I give you these names you will keep them strictly to yourself?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Mackinder. "I am at peace with the world and have no desire to injure anybody whatever—let alone murder them."

Dr. Perthwell went to the door of the dining-room, opened it, closed it again, and returned to his seat.

"You will pardon me, Mr. Mackinder. I had to be quite certain that I could not be overheard."

He gave the names of the two drugs and Mr. Mackinder wrote them down in his note-book. He put each name down on a different page and the two pages were at some distance apart. Mr. Mackinder was cunning.

On the following day Mr. Mackinder purchased, without question or suspicion being roused, one ounce of each of these drugs, at two different chemists'. He was surprised at the vast amount he got for sixpence. He had enough to murder the entire neighbourhood if he had had any spite against it.

He was a methodical man. He took two large sheets

of white paper and cut them into small squares. Into each square he put a quarter of a teaspoon of the first drug and folded it into a neat packet. He then took two sheets of blue paper and did the same thing with the other drug, being perhaps inspired with the classical example of the Seidlitz powder. There was still some of each drug remaining, and this he destroyed in the fire. He placed the packets neatly in a cardboard cigarette-box and put the box in a large desk which in theory he always kept locked, and quite frequently did.

He had now the means at hand to destroy forty-eight people. He positively tingled with power. If the worst came to the worst—and at present there was no worst and it was not coming to anything—he felt that he could deal with it.

And the years went on. It happened that once Elsa asked her father :

" What are all those funny little papers in the cigarette-box in your writing-desk ? I noticed them to-day when I went there to get stamps. By the way, you don't keep as many stamps as you used to."

" Well," said Mr. Mackinder, " as regards the papers in the box, I think I may tell you about them because they are of extraordinary interest. But so far as I remember, I am to some extent restricted. You would have to promise me that you would tell nobody what I am going to tell you."

" Of course," said Elsa.

Mr. Mackinder then told his daughter precisely what Dr. Perthwell had told him.

And the years still went on and Miss Jessie Palkinshaw became a fully-qualified nurse and went in for private work. And then came the letter from Robert Filminster.

Mr. Mackinder knew Mr. Filminster, whose age was at this time verging on the nineties, quite well. He

knew that Mr. Filminster had been a friend of his father's and had, in fact, financed him over various crises before the business came to a position of steady security. He had been assured by Mr. Filminster that the greater part of his property would go to Mr. Mackinder for life and to his daughter after him.

Mr. Filminster's letter was simply pathetic. He said that he knew he was on the verge of death. The end of the lease of his house was up and he had been unable, even by a most extravagant offer, to obtain just two or three weeks' prolongation. He felt that he could not go into a hotel, for that would kill him painfully and at once. He knew that he asked much, but would Mr. Mackinder consent to put him up, together with his nurse, Jessie Palkinshaw, until the end came?

Mr. Mackinder felt that he could not do otherwise than accept. His daughter Elsa agreed with him. She was also glad of this coincidence which brought Jessie Palkinshaw back into her life. Questioned, Mr. Mackinder could say very little about Mr. Filminster. He remembered him as a very quiet and scholarly old gentleman. He reproached himself that they had not met more frequently in recent years.

So Mr. Filminster was accepted and arrived in his own expensive car with his nurse by his side. He seemed somewhat wearied with the journey and glad to get to bed. Not till he was safely asleep did Jessie Palkinshaw descend to talk things over with the eager Elsa Mackinder. They both rejoiced at the renewal of their rapturous friendship. Miss Palkinshaw looked like a saint of wonderful serenity in her nurse's uniform. Elsa, with her shingled hair, felt worldly and common in comparison.

"Tell me now, darling," said Elsa. "What kind of a man is this Mr. Filminster?"

"I think," said Nurse Palkinshaw, "that you are likely to have trouble with him. It cannot be for long, however, because his own doctor assured me that he

could not last for more than a week, and there was even some question whether he would not die in the car coming down here. But Mr. Filminster does not like doctors and cannot be expected to do everything they say."

"But what kind of man is he?"

"He's more than one kind of man. The first week I was with him he was always very patient and nice and behaved himself. He can do it still if he wants to do it. He was all right when he arrived here to-day, for instance. Otherwise he has become so eccentric and wild—no doubt owing to his disease—that sometimes it is very, very difficult to put up with him. Of course, a nurse who is any good must be prepared to put up with absolutely anything. I was sent to him by a doctor who is well disposed towards me and has plenty of work to give. I don't want to lose my market. Whatever Mr. Filminster does or does not do I shall hang on until the lid's screwed down. When he is in one of his bad moods he uses the most terrific language you ever heard."

"Blasphemous?"

"That of course. Only yesterday in three words he implied that my soul was lost, that I had the hæmorrhagic diathesis, and that I was of illegitimate birth. But that's not all, by a long way. He often uses language which is—well, physiological."

"But they have physiological language in books, don't they?"

"There are two kinds of physiological language. His is the other. I advise you to keep out of his way as much as possible."

"Oh, but I do want to help," said Elsa. "I don't want you to be worked to death. If you can put up with things, I must make up my mind to put up with them, too."

"Well," said the nurse, "he's not perhaps been quite so bad lately. He's had a good deal of pain and that

always keeps him quiet. I don't think he's actually broken a measuring-glass for three days."

"I suppose the poor old man can't hold them properly."

"That's not it. He throws them, you know. He throws pretty well everything. He says it's the only form of exercise that he's got now. We buy our measuring-glasses by the dozen, and they don't last long. Every now and then he gets a fit of wonderful activity and would go out into the street if he were allowed to have any clothes in his room. But he isn't. Of course, I have to use a good deal of tact. As a matter of fact I could pick the old chap up and carry him. But if he used any great effort, that might bring on the end suddenly. No, I shouldn't describe it as a soft case—not easy, by any means."

At dinner that night Mr. Mackinder heard much of the story and was calmly philosophical.

"We must make up our minds to be patient," he said. "It is a question of a few days only. Surely we can put up with that. To-morrow Dr. Perthwell will be in to see him. No doubt he will be able to tell us something."

On the next morning at breakfast Nurse looked a little worn. Mr. Mackinder asked kindly how her patient was getting on.

"If anything he seems a little stronger. He had one of his fits of activity, but he's safely asleep again now. He's started porridge-sloshing again."

"Started which?" asked Mr. Mackinder.

"Porridge-sloshing is what he calls it. He always will have porridge for breakfast, and the doctors say he is to have anything he likes. Some days he will eat it and some days he won't. It's when he won't that he starts this porridge-sloshing. He fills the spoon full with porridge, holds the end of the handle in one hand, and with a finger of the other draws back the tip of the spoon

and suddenly lets go. He can send it quite a considerable distance that way. He generally aims at the different pictures in the room, but he's got me with it two or three times. It always seems to amuse him. Of course, it makes a good deal of work clearing up afterwards."

"Naturally," said Mr. Mackinder. "I should hate to be unkind, but I think I must just ask Perthwell if he doesn't think the poor old chap had better be put into a—one of those institutions where those old chaps are put, you know."

But Dr. Perthwell gave no support to these hopes.

"My dear Mackinder," he said, "I could not possibly certify this Mr. Filminster. He is eccentric, no doubt, and his temperament is much altered by his illness, as any medical man would expect. But he has no delusions and he is not dangerous to anybody. Even if he were I should advise you to let him remain. So far as I can see, in three days he must be dead. You do not want to stuff him into an asylum just for those last three days of his life."

"Certainly not," said Mr. Mackinder. "I had not realised that the end was so near. Three days, I think you said?"

"I may be wrong, but from my observations to-day I should think three days would be the limit."

But Mr. Filminster had no great belief in doctors. He lived on for another two months, and by that time the nerves of Mr. Mackinder, his daughter Elsa, and Nurse Palkinshaw were frazzled and pulped. Most of the work fell on them. The butler had already left on the grounds that he had been engaged for a private house and not for Bedlam. And Mr. Mackinder did not care to risk losing any other of the upper servants. He and his daughter and the nurse saw it through, relieving one another at intervals. All Dr. Perthwell could say was that he had never seen such a case before. He had never

met with such extraordinary vitality. Any ordinary man must have been dead long before.

Mr. Mackinder, his daughter, and the nurse used no hypocrisy. They longed for Mr. Filminster's death. As a concession to decency they said it would be a blessed release for all concerned.

After luncheon Nurse Palkinshaw and Elsa Mackinder were taking two hours off duty for the preservation of their health and sanity. The nurse had had a fit of hysterics of brief duration just before luncheon. Mr. Mackinder remained on duty. From his study he could easily hear Mr. Filminster's bell if he struck it. However, Mr. Filminster was now asleep and Mr. Mackinder hoped that, as usual, there would be nothing for him to do. Requiring a postcard, he opened his desk, and he left it open. And then he heard the whirr of the bell on the table by Mr. Filminster's bedside. Almost immediately it was repeated. Mr. Mackinder hurried upstairs.

He had hardly got inside the door when a slipper, thrown with considerable force, struck him in the face, the heel of the slipper barking his nose.

"Why don't you pay attention?" said Mr. Filminster. "I want a whisky and soda. The doctors said I could have anything I liked, didn't they? When you're on duty you're jolly well on duty, and don't you forget it another time or I might hop out of bed and twist your blessed nose."

The more salient and picturesque adjectives have been omitted or substitutes have been provided.

"That is hardly the way to speak to me," said Mr. Mackinder. "And you've caused the bridge of my nose to bleed. However, I will bring you what you require."

Mr. Mackinder went downstairs with blue murder in his heart. He remembered the open desk and the cigarette-box with the papers in it. Without hesitation he took a glass and emptied into it a white powder and a blue powder. In this he poured whisky and subsequently soda-water.

Mr. Filminster took the contents of the glass in one draught, told Mr. Mackinder where he could go, and then flung the glass after him, but fortunately missed. In two minutes more Mr. Filminster was asleep again.

Downstairs Mr. Mackinder wrestled with his agonised conscience. But as he summed up the question he could not see that he had done much harm. There was not a day when Mr. Filminster did not beg them to give him something to put an end to it all. There was the best medical opinion that he could only live for a few hours now. The man was simply killing his daughter Elsa and Nurse Palkinshaw and they were both absolute wrecks. On the whole Mr. Mackinder decided he had acted wisely. He then put a small strip of pink plaster across the bridge of his nose.

He waited impatiently for the return of his daughter and the nurse about an hour later. In reply to their enquiries he said that he had taken up a whisky and soda to Mr. Filminster and this was all there had been for him to do.

He waited for them to go upstairs and to come down quickly announcing that Filminster was dead.

They did not come down quickly. When they appeared in the drawing-room Elsa rang for tea quite casually and Nurse Palkinshaw said that Mr. Filminster seemed stronger but was not in a good temper.

Mr. Mackinder reflected. Those drugs had been in his desk for some time. Possibly they had now lost their efficacy. He was in reality not sorry to think so.

On the following morning, as Mr. Mackinder sat at his early breakfast at eight o'clock, Nurse Palkinshaw entered the room.

"Mr. Filminster is dead," she said. "He seems to have passed away in his sleep. I have telephoned to Dr. Perthwell. But that is not all. I was tried beyond human endurance. I have a confession to make to you."

She made it.

"What am I to do?" she cried despairingly.

"Nothing whatever at present," said Mr. Mackinder. "Leave things entirely in my hands. I will tell you more after the funeral."

And then, after the nurse had gone out, Elsa entered. She helped herself to a poached egg and a cup of China tea and then burst into tears and said she must confess all. Her father heard the confession and gave his instructions.

"At present," he said, "say nothing to anybody. After the funeral we must decide what is the right and moral thing to do."

Dr. Perthwell had not the least hesitation in giving a certificate that the death was due to natural causes, and in due course the funeral took place. Afterwards, by appointment, Dr. Perthwell attended Mr. Mackinder at his house.

"I think," said Mr. Mackinder, "by your certificate you attribute poor Filminster's death to his illness."

"Of course I did. It was the truth. Why not?"

"I have your promise of secrecy? I am speaking, so to say, under the seal of the professional?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well, I may tell you that Filminster was murdered."

"Murdered?"

"Yes. What is more, he was murdered three times."

"Three times?"

"Yes, and not only that. He also committed suicide."

"I think you'd better give me the details of this extraordinary story."

Mr. Mackinder then narrated how he himself had murdered Filminster. He showed that his motives were the best possible, and said nothing about the abrasion on his nose.

"And then," Mr. Mackinder continued, "my daughter and the nurse came back. My daughter is absolutely devoted to Jessie Palkinshaw. She heard the language that Mr. Filminster was using to his nurse and felt

absolutely unable to endure it. Unluckily, my desk was still wide open on the study table. She emptied one of each of the powders into the tea which was being taken up to him."

"Go on," said Dr. Perthwell. "He was murdered three times, you say."

"And also committed suicide. I think the nurse did what she did in a fit of temporary insanity caused by the awful overstrain. In the evening she took up to his room the cigarette-box containing the poisons and put the powders into his last whisky and soda. I cannot understand it, but she left that box on the table by his bedside. There was also there a jug of water and a glass. In the morning she found that the glass had been used and one of the white papers and one of the blue lay on the table. He had taken his own life."

"I don't think so," said Dr. Perthwell cheerily. "What's all this about white and blue papers?"

"Surely you remember that you once told me that there were two drugs—you gave me the name of them—which were innocuous in themselves but would be fatal in one hour if mixed together."

"Well," said Dr. Perthwell, "you rather tempted me, you know. You did like to have a sensational story, didn't you? As a matter of fact, those drugs are both of them, singly or in conjunction, absolutely harmless. Had it been otherwise, you can't suppose that any conscientious medical man would have told you the facts!"

"Why not?"

"You promised me absolute secrecy, you know."

"Yes," said Mr. Mackinder. "I think there was something said. As a matter of fact, I told nobody but my own daughter, and the supposed poisons were very frequently kept locked up."

"Then how did the nurse know about it?"

"Well, the nurse is one of my daughter's most intimate

friends and she promised Elsa that it shouldn't go any further."

The doctor yawned.

"I see," he said. "Well, I must be getting on. I shouldn't let it worry me if I were you. I don't suppose any one of the three was completely sane at the time."

That afternoon, I regret to say, Mr. Mackinder, his daughter, and the nurse went to the Pictures.

THE TARN

By Hugh Walpole

I

As Foster moved unconsciously across the room, bent towards the bookcase, and stood leaning forward a little, choosing now one book, now another, with his eye, his host, seeing the muscles of the back of his thin, scraggy neck stand out above his low flannel collar, thought of the ease with which he could squeeze that throat, and the pleasure, the triumphant, lustful pleasure, that such an action would give him.

The low, white-walled, white-ceilinged room was flooded with the mellow, kindly Lakeland sun. October is a wonderful month in the English Lakes, golden, rich, and perfumed, slow suns moving through apricot-tinted skies to ruby evening glories; the shadows lie then thick about that beautiful country, in dark purple patches, in long web-like patterns of silver gauze, in thick splotches of amber and grey. The clouds pass in galleons across the mountains, now veiling, now revealing, now descending with ghost-like armies to the very breast of the plains, suddenly rising to the softest of blue skies and lying thin in lazy languorous colour.

Fenwick's cottage looked across to Low Fells; on his right, seen through side windows, sprawled the hills above Ullswater.

Fenwick looked at Foster's back and felt suddenly sick, so that he sat down, veiling his eyes for a moment with

his hand. Foster had come up there, come all the way from London, to explain. It was so like Foster to want to explain, to want to put things right. For how many years had he known Foster? Why, for twenty at least, and during all those years Foster had been for ever determined to put things right with everybody. He could never bear to be disliked; he hated that anyone should think ill of him; he wanted everyone to be his friend. That was one reason, perhaps, why Foster had got on so well, had prospered so in his career; one reason, too, why Fenwick had not.

For Fenwick was the opposite of Foster in this. He did not want friends, he certainly did not care that people should like him—that is, people for whom, for one reason or another, he had contempt—and he had contempt for quite a number of people.

Fenwick looked at that long, thin, bending back and felt his knees tremble. Soon Foster would turn round and that high reedy voice would pipe out something about the books. "What jolly books you have, Fenwick!" How many, many times in the long watches of the night, when Fenwick could not sleep, had he heard that pipe sounding close there—yes, in the very shadows of his bed! And how many times had Fenwick replied to it: "I hate you! You are the cause of my failure in life! You have been in my way always. Always, always, always! Patronising and pretending, and in truth showing others what a poor thing you thought me, how great a failure, how conceited a fool! I know. You can hide nothing from me! I can hear you!"

For twenty years now Foster had been persistently in Fenwick's way. There had been that affair, so long ago now, when Robins had wanted a sub-editor for his wonderful review, the *Parthenon*, and Fenwick had gone to see him and they had had a splendid talk. How magnificently Fenwick had talked that day; with what enthusiasm he had shown Robins (who was blinded by his own conceit,

anyway) the kind of paper the *Parthenon* might be; how Robins had caught his own enthusiasm, how he had pushed his fat body about the room, crying: "Yes, yes, Fenwick—that's fine! That's fine indeed!"—and then how, after all, Foster had got that job.

The paper had only lived for a year or so, it is true, but the connection with it had brought Foster into prominence just as it might have brought Fenwick!

Then, five years later, there was Fenwick's novel, "The Bitter Aloe"—the novel upon which he had spent three years of blood-and-tears endeavour—and then, in the very same week of publication, Foster brings out "The Circus," the novel that made his name; although, Heaven knows, the thing was poor enough sentimental trash. You may say that one novel cannot kill another—but can it not? Had not "The Circus" appeared would not that group of London know-alls—that conceited, limited, ignorant, self-satisfied crowd, who nevertheless can do, by their talk, so much to affect a book's good or evil fortunes—have talked about "The Bitter Aloe" and so forced it into prominence? As it was, the book was still-born and "The Circus" went on its prancing, triumphant way.

After that there had been many occasions—some small, some big—and always in one way or another that thin, scraggy body of Foster's was interfering with Fenwick's happiness.

The thing had become, of course, an obsession with Fenwick. Hiding up there in the heart of the Lakes, with no friends, almost no company, and very little money, he was given too much to brooding over his failure. He *was* a failure and it was not his own fault. How could it be his own fault with his talents and his brilliance? It was the fault of modern life and its lack of culture, the fault of the stupid material mess that made up the intelligence of human beings—and the fault of Foster.

Always Fenwick hoped that Foster would keep away from him. He did not know what he would not do did

he see the man. And then one day, to his amazement, he received a telegram:

Passing through this way May I stop with you Monday and Tuesday—Giles Foster.

Fenwick could scarcely believe his eyes, and then—from curiosity, from cynical contempt, from some deeper, more mysterious motive that he dared not analyse—he had telegraphed, "Come."

And here the man was. And he had come—would you believe it?—to "put things right." He had heard from Hamlin Eddis that Fenwick was hurt with him, had some kind of a grievance.

"I didn't like to feel that, old man, and so I thought I'd just stop by and have it out with you, see what the matter was, and put it right."

Last night after supper Foster had tried to put it right. Eagerly, his eyes like a good dog's who is asking for a bone that he knows he thoroughly deserves, he had held out his hand and asked Fenwick to "say what was up."

Fenwick simply had said that nothing was up; Hamlin Eddis was a damned fool.

"Oh, I'm glad to hear that!" Foster had cried, springing up out of his chair and putting his hand on Fenwick's shoulder. "I'm glad of that, old man. I couldn't bear for us not to be friends. We've been friends so long."

Lord! How Fenwick hated him at that moment!

II

"What a jolly lot of books you have!" Foster turned round and looked at Fenwick with eager, gratified eyes. "Every book here is interesting! I like your arrangement

of them, too, and those open bookshelves—it always seems to me a shame to shut up books behind glass!"

Foster came forward and sat down quite close to his host. He even reached forward and laid his hand on his host's knee. "Look here! I'm mentioning it for the last time—positively! But I do want to make quite certain. There *is* nothing wrong between us, is there, old man? I know you assured me last night, but I just want——"

Fenwick looked at him and, surveying him, felt suddenly an exquisite pleasure of hatred. He liked the touch of the man's hand on his knee; he himself bent forward a little and, thinking how agreeable it would be to push Foster's eyes in, deep, deep into his head, crunching them, smashing them to purple, leaving the empty, staring, bloody sockets, said:

"Why, no. Of course not. I told you last night. What could there be?"

The hand gripped the knee a little more tightly.

"I *am* so glad! That's splendid! Splendid! I hope you won't think me ridiculous, but I've always had an affection for you ever since I can remember. I've always wanted to know you better. I've admired your talent so greatly. That novel of yours—the—the—the one about the aloe——"

"'The Bitter Aloe'?"

"Ah, yes, that was it. That was a splendid book. Pessimistic, of course, but still fine. It ought to have done better. I remember thinking so at the time."

"Yes, it ought to have done better."

"Your time will come, though. What I say is that good work always tells in the end."

"Yes, my time will come."

The thin piping voice went on:

"Now, I've had more success than I deserved. Oh yes, I have. You can't deny it. I'm not falsely modest. I mean it. I've got some talent, of course, but not so

much as people say. And you! Why, you've got so *much* more than they acknowledge. You have, old man. You have indeed. Only—I do hope you'll forgive my saying this—perhaps you haven't advanced quite as you might have done. Living up here, shut away here, closed in by all these mountains, in this wet climate—always raining—why, you're out of things! You don't see people, don't talk and discover what's really going on. Why, look at me!"

Fenwick turned round and looked at him.

"Now, I have half the year in London, where one gets the best of everything, best talk, best music, best plays; and then I'm three months abroad, Italy or Greece or somewhere, and then three months in the country. Now that's an ideal arrangement. You have everything that way."

Italy or Greece or somewhere!

Something turned in Fenwick's breast, grinding, grinding, grinding. How he had longed, oh, how passionately, for just one week in Greece, two days in Sicily! Sometimes he had thought that he might run to it, but when it had come to the actual counting of the pennies . . . And how this fool, this fathead, this self-satisfied, conceited, patronising . . .

He got up, looking out at the golden sun.

"What do you say to a walk?" he suggested. "The sun will last for a good hour yet."

III

As soon as the words were out of his lips he felt as though someone else had said them for him. He even turned half-round to see whether anyone else were there. Ever since Foster's arrival on the evening before he had been conscious of this sensation. A walk? Why should he take Foster for a walk, show him his beloved country, point out those curves and lines and hollows, the broad

silver shield of Ullswater, the cloudy purple hills hunched like blankets about the knees of some recumbent giant? Why? It was as though he had turned round to someone behind him and had said: "You have some further design in this."

They started out. The road sank abruptly to the lake, then the path ran between trees at the water's edge. Across the lake tones of bright yellow light, crocus-hued, rode upon the blue. The hills were dark.

The very way that Foster walked bespoke the man. He was always a little ahead of you, pushing his long, thin body along with little eager jerks, as though, did he not hurry, he would miss something that would be immensely to his advantage. He talked, throwing words over his shoulder to Fenwick as you throw crumbs of bread to a robin.

"Of course I was pleased. Who would not be? After all, it's a new prize. They've only been awarding it for a year or two, but it's gratifying—really gratifying—to secure it. When I opened the envelope and found the cheque there—well, you could have knocked me down with a feather. You could, indeed. Of course, a hundred pounds isn't much. But it's the honour——"

Whither were they going? Their destiny was as certain as though they had no free-will. Free-will? There is no free-will. All is Fate. Fenwick suddenly laughed aloud.

Foster stopped.

"Why, what is it?"

"What's what?"

"You laughed."

"Something amused me."

Foster slipped his arm through Fenwick's.

"It *is* jolly to be walking along together like this, arm in arm, friends. I'm a sentimental man. I won't deny it. What I say is that life is short and one must love one's fellow-beings, or where is one? You live too much alone,

old man." He squeezed Fenwick's arm. "That's the truth of it."

It was torture, exquisite, heavenly torture. It was wonderful to feel that thin, bony arm pressing against his. Almost you could hear the beating of that other heart. Wonderful to feel that arm and the temptation to take it in your hands and to bend it and twist it and then to hear the bones crack . . . crack . . . crack. . . . Wonderful to feel that temptation rise through one's body like boiling water and yet not to yield to it. For a moment Fenwick's hand touched Foster's. Then he drew himself apart.

"We're at the village. This is the hotel where they all come in the summer. We turn off at the right here. I'll show you my tarn."

IV

"Your tarn?" asked Foster. "Forgive my ignorance, but what *is* a tarn exactly?"

"A tarn is a miniature lake, a pool of water lying in the lap of the hill. Very quiet, lovely, silent. Some of them are immensely deep."

"I should like to see that."

"It is some little distance—up a rough road. Do you mind?"

"Not a bit. I have long legs."

"Some of them are immensely deep—unfathomable—nobody touched the bottom—but quiet, like glass, with shadows only——"

"Do you know, Fenwick, I have always been afraid of water—I've never learnt to swim. I'm afraid to go out of my depth. Isn't that ridiculous? But it is all because at my private school, years ago, when I was a small boy, some big fellows took me and held me with my head under the water and nearly drowned me. They did indeed. They went farther than they meant to. I can see their faces."

Fenwick considered this. The picture leapt to his mind. He could see the boys—large strong fellows, probably—and this skinny thing like a frog, their thick hands about his throat, his legs like grey sticks kicking out of the water, their laughter, their sudden sense that something was wrong, the skinny body all flaccid and still——

He drew a deep breath.

Foster was walking beside him now, not ahead of him, as though he were a little afraid and needed reassurance. Indeed, the scene had changed. Before and behind them stretched the uphill path, loose with shale and stones. On their right, on a ridge at the foot of the hill, were some quarries, almost deserted, but the more melancholy in the fading afternoon because a little work still continued there; faint sounds came from the gaunt listening chimneys, a stream of water ran and tumbled angrily into a pool below, once and again a black silhouette, like a question-mark, appeared against the darkening hill.

It was a little steep here and Foster puffed and blew.

Fenwick hated him the more for that. So thin and spare, and still he could not keep in condition! They stumbled, keeping below the quarry, on the edge of the running water, now green, now a dirty white-grey, pushing their way along the side of the hill.

Their faces were set now towards Helvellyn. It rounded the cup of hills closing in the base and then sprawling to the right.

"There's the tarn!" Fenwick exclaimed—and then added, "The sun's not lasting as long as I had expected. It's growing dark already."

Foster stumbled and caught Fenwick's arm.

"This twilight makes the hills look strange—like living men. I can scarcely see my way."

"We're alone here," Fenwick answered. "Don't you feel the stillness? The men will have left the quarry now and gone home. There is no one in all this place but ourselves. If you watch you will see a

strange green light steal down over the hills. It lasts for but a moment and then it is dark.

"Ah, here is my tarn. Do you know how I love this place, Foster? It seems to belong especially to me, just as much as all your work and your glory and fame and success seem to belong to you. I have this and you have that. Perhaps in the end we are even, after all. Yes. . . .

"But I feel as though that piece of water belonged to me and I to it, and as though we should never be separated —yes. . . . Isn't it black?

"It is one of the deep ones. No one has ever sounded it. Only Helvellyn knows, and one day I fancy that it will take me, too, into its confidence, will whisper its secrets——"

Foster sneezed.

"Very nice. Very beautiful, Fenwick. I like your tarn. Charming. And now let's turn back. That is a difficult walk beneath the quarry. It's chilly, too."

"Do you see that little jetty there?" Fenwick led Foster by the arm. "Someone built that out into the water. He had a boat there, I suppose. Come and look down. From the end of the little jetty it looks so deep and the mountains seem to close round."

Fenwick took Foster's arm and led him to the end of the jetty. Indeed, the water looked deep here. Deep and very black. Foster peered down, then he looked up at the hills that did indeed seem to have gathered close around him. He sneezed again.

"I've caught a cold, I am afraid. Let's turn homewards, Fenwick, or we shall never find our way."

"Home then," said Fenwick, and his hands closed about the thin, scraggy neck. For the instant the head half turned, and two startled, strangely childish eyes stared; then, with a push that was ludicrously simple, the body was impelled forward, there was a sharp cry, a splash, a stir of something white against the swiftly gathering dusk, again and then again, then far-spreading ripples, then silence.

V

The silence extended. Having enwrapped the tarn it spread as though with finger on lip to the already quiescent hills. Fenwick shared in the silence. He luxuriated in it. He did not move at all. He stood there looking upon the inky water of the tarn, his arms folded, a man lost in intensest thought. But he was not thinking. He was only conscious of a warm, luxurious relief, a sensuous feeling that was not thought at all.

Foster was gone—that tiresome, prating, conceited, self-satisfied fool! Gone, never to return. The tarn assured him of that. It stared back into Fenwick's face approvingly as though it said: "You have done well—a clean and necessary job. We have done it together, you and I. I am proud of you."

He was proud of himself. At last he had done something definite with his life. Thought, eager, active thought, was beginning now to flood his brain. For all these years he had hung around in this place doing nothing but cherish grievances, weak, backboneless—now at last there was action. He drew himself up and looked at the hills. He was proud—and he was cold. He was shivering. He turned up the collar of his coat. Yes, there was that faint green light that always lingered in the shadows of the hills for a brief moment before darkness came. It was growing late. He had better return.

Shivering now so that his teeth chattered, he started off down the path, and then was aware that he did not wish to leave the tarn. The tarn was friendly—the only friend he had in all the world. As he stumbled along in the dark this sense of loneliness grew. He was going home to an empty house. There had been a guest in it last night. Who was it? Why, Foster, of course—Foster with his silly laugh and amiable, mediocre eyes. Well, Foster would not be there now. No, he never would be there again.

And suddenly Fenwick started to run. He did not know why, except that, now that he had left the tarn, he was lonely. He wished that he could have stayed there all night, but because it was cold he could not, and so now he was running so that he might be at home with the lights and the familiar furniture—and all the things that he knew to reassure him.

As he ran the shale and stones scattered beneath his feet. They made a tit-tattering noise under him, and someone else seemed to be running too. He stopped, and the other runner also stopped. He breathed in the silence. He was hot now. The perspiration was trickling down his cheeks. He could feel a dribble of it down his back inside his shirt. His knees were pounding. His heart was thumping. And all around him the hills were so amazingly silent, now like india-rubber clouds that you could push in or pull out as you do those india-rubber faces, grey against the night sky of a crystal purple, upon whose surface, like the twinkling eyes of boats at sea, stars were now appearing.

His knees steadied, his heart beat less fiercely, and he began to run again. Suddenly he had turned the corner and was out at the hotel. Its lamps were kindly and reassuring. He walked then quietly along the lake-side path, and had it not been for the certainty that someone was treading behind him he would have been comfortable and at his ease. He stopped once or twice and looked back, and once he stopped and called out, "Who's there?" Only the rustling trees answered.

He had the strangest fancy, but his brain was throbbing so fiercely that he could not think, that it was the tarn that was following him, the tarn slipping, sliding along the road, being with him so that he should not be lonely. He could almost hear the tarn whisper in his ear: "We did that together, and so I do not wish you to bear all the responsibility yourself. I will stay with you, so that you are not lonely."

He climbed down the road towards home, and there were the lights of his house. He heard the gate click behind him as though it were shutting him in. He went into the sitting-room, lighted and ready. There were the books that Foster had admired.

The old woman who looked after him appeared.

"Will you be having some tea, sir?"

"No, thank you, Annie."

"Will the other gentleman be wanting any?"

"No; the other gentleman is away for the night."

"Then there will be only one for supper?"

"Yes, only one for supper."

He sat in the corner of the sofa and fell instantly into a deep slumber.

VI

He woke when the old woman tapped him on the shoulder and told him that supper was served. The room was dark save for the jumping light of two uncertain candles. Those two red candlesticks—how he hated them up there on the mantelpiece! He had always hated them, and now they seemed to him to have something of the quality of Foster's voice—that thin, reedy, piping tone.

He was expecting at every moment that Foster would enter, and yet he knew that he would not. He continued to turn his head towards the door, but it was so dark there that you could not see. The whole room was dark except just there by the fireplace, where the two candlesticks went whining with their miserable twinkling plaint.

He went into the dining-room and sat down to his meal. But he could not eat anything. It was odd—that place by the table where Foster's chair should be. Odd, naked, and made a man feel lonely.

He got up once from the table and went to the window, opened it and looked out. He listened for something.

A trickle as of running water, a stir, through the silence, as though some deep pool were filling to the brim. A rustle in the trees, perhaps. An owl hooted. Sharply, as though someone had spoken to him unexpectedly behind his shoulder, he closed the window and looked back, peering under his dark eyebrows into the room.

Later on he went up to bed.

VII

Had he been sleeping, or had he been lying lazily, as one does, half-dozing, half-luxuriously not-thinking? He was wide awake now, utterly awake, and his heart was beating with apprehension. It was as though someone had called him by name. He slept always with his window a little open and the blind up. To-night the moonlight shadowed in sickly fashion the objects in his room. It was not a flood of light nor yet a sharp splash, silvering a square, a circle, throwing the rest into ebony darkness. The light was dim, a little green, perhaps, like the shadow that comes over the hills just before dark.

He stared at the window, and it seemed to him that something moved there. Within, or rather against the green-grey light, something silver-tinted glistened. Fenwick stared. It had the look, exactly, of slipping water.

Slipping water! He listened, his head up, and it seemed to him that from beyond the window he caught the stir of water, not running, but rather welling up and up, gurgling with satisfaction as it filled and filled.

He sat up higher in bed, and then saw that down the wallpaper beneath the window water was undoubtedly trickling. He could see it lurch to the projecting wood of the sill, pause, and then slip, slither down the incline. The odd thing was that it fell so silently.

Beyond the window there was that odd gurgle, but in the room itself absolute silence. Whence could it come? He saw the line of silver rise and fall as the stream on the window-ledge ebbed and flowed.

He must get up and close the window. He drew his legs above the sheets and blankets and looked down.

He shrieked. The floor was covered with a shining film of water. It was rising. As he looked it had covered half the short stumpy legs of the bed. It rose without a wink, a bubble, a break! Over the sill it poured now in a steady flow, but soundless. Fenwick sat up in the bed, the clothes gathered up to his chin, his eyes blinking, the Adam's apple throbbing like a throttle in his throat.

But he must do something, he must stop this. The water was now level with the seats of the chairs, but still was soundless. Could he but reach the door!

He put down his naked foot, then cried again. The water was icy cold. Suddenly, leaning, staring at its dark, unbroken sheen, something seemed to push him forward. He fell. His head, his face was under the icy liquid; it seemed adhesive and, in the heart of its ice, hot like melting wax. He struggled to his feet. The water was breast-high. He streamed again and again. He could see the looking-glass, the row of books, the picture of Dürer's "Horse," aloof, impervious. He beat at the water, and flakes of it seemed to cling to him like scales of fish, clammy to his touch. He struggled, ploughing his way towards the door.

The water now was at his neck. Then something had caught him by the ankle. Something held him. He struggled, crying: "Let me go! Let me go! I tell you to let me go! I hate you! I hate you! I will not come down to you! I will not——"

The water covered his mouth. He felt that someone pushed in his eyeballs with bare knuckles. A cold hand reached up and caught his naked thigh.

VIII

In the morning the little maid knocked and, receiving no answer, came in, as was her wont, with his shaving-water. What she saw made her scream. She ran for the gardener.

They took the body with its staring, protruding eyes, its tongue sticking out between the clenched teeth, and laid it on the bed.

The only sign of disorder was an overturned water-jug. A small pool of water stained the carpet.

It was a lovely morning. A twig of ivy idly, in the little breeze, tapped the pane.

THE ISLINGTON MYSTERY

By Arthur Machen.

I

The public taste in murders is often erratic, and sometimes, I think, fallible enough. Take, for example, that Crippen business. It happened seventeen years ago, and it is still freshly remembered and discussed with interest. Yet it was by no means a murder of the first rank. What was there in it? The outline is crude enough; simple, easy, and disgusting, as Dr. Johnson observed of another work of art. Crippen was cursed with a nagging wife of unpleasant habits; and he cherished a passion for his typist. Whereupon, he poisoned Mrs. Crippen, cut her up and buried the pieces in the coal-cellar. This was well enough, though elementary; and if the foolish little man had been content to lie quiet and do nothing, he might have lived and died peaceably. But he must needs disappear from his house—the action of a fool—and cross the Atlantic with his typist absurdly and obviously disguised as a boy: sheer, bungling imbecility. Here, surely, there is no single trace of the master's hand; and yet, as I say, the Crippen Murder is reckoned amongst the masterpieces. It is the same tale in all the arts: the low comedian was always sure of a laugh if he cared to tumble over a pin; and the weakest murderer is sure of a certain amount of respectful attention if he will take the trouble to dismember his subject. And then, with

respect to Crippen: he was caught by means of the wireless device, then in its early stages. This, of course, was utterly irrelevant to the true issue; but the public wallows in irrelevance. A great art critic may praise a great picture, and make his criticism a masterpiece in itself. He will be unread; but let some asinine paragraphist say that the painter always sings "Tom Bowling" as he sets his palette, and dines on boiled fowl and apricot sauce three times a week—then the world will proclaim the artist great.

II

The success of the second-rate is deplorable in itself; but it is more deplorable in that it very often obscures the genuine masterpiece. If the crowd runs after the false, it must neglect the true. The intolerable "Romola" is praised; the admirable "Cloister and the Hearth" is waived aside. So, while the very indifferent and clumsy performance of Crippen filled the papers, the extraordinary Battersea Murder was served with a scanty paragraph or two in obscure corners of the Press. Indeed, we were so shamefully starved of detail, that I only retain a bare outline of this superb crime in my memory; but, roughly, the affair was shaped as follows: In the first floor of one of the smaller sets of flats in Battersea a young fellow (? 18—20) was talking to an actress, a "touring" actress of no particular fame, whose age, if I recollect, was drawing on from thirty to forty. A shot, a near shot, broke in suddenly on their talk. The young man dashed out of the flat, down the stairs, and there, in the entry of the flats, found his own father, shot dead. The father, it should be remarked, was a touring actor, and an old friend of the lady upstairs. But here comes the magistral element in this murder. Beside the dead man, or in the hand of the dead man, or in a pocket of the dead man's

coat—I am not sure how it was—there was found a weapon made of heavy wire—a vile and most deadly contraption, fashioned with curious and malignant ingenuity. It was night-time, but the bright light of a moon ten days old was shining, and the young man said he saw someone running and leaping over walls. But mark the point: the dead actor was hiding beneath his friend's flat, hiding and lying in wait, with his villainous weapon to his hand. He was expecting an encounter with some enemy, on whom he was resolved to work at least deadly mischief, if not murder.

Who was that enemy? Whose bullet was it that was swifter than the dead man's savage and premeditated desire?

We shall probably never know. A murder that might have stood in the very first rank, that might have vied with the affair of Madeleine Smith—there were certain indications that made this seem possible—was suffered to fade into obscurity, while the foolish crowd surged about elementary Crippen and his bungling imbecilities. So there were once people who considered "Robert Elsmere" as a literary work of palmary significance.

III

Naturally, and with some excuse, the war was responsible for a good deal of this sort of neglect. In those appalling years there was but one thing in men's heads; all else was blotted out. So, little attention was paid to the affair of the woman's body, carefully wrapped in sacking, which was found in Regent's Square, by the Gray's Inn Road. A man was hanged without phrases, but there were one or two curious points in the case. Then, again, there was the Wimbledon Murder, a singular business. A well-to-do family had just moved into a big house facing the Common, so recently that many of its goods and chattels were still in the packing-cases. The

master of the house was murdered one night by a man who made off with his booty. It was a curious haul, consisting of a mackintosh worth, perhaps, a couple of pounds, and a watch which would have been dear at ten shillings. This murderer, too, was hanged without comment; and yet, on the face of it, his conduct seems in need of explanation. But the most singular case of all those that suffered from the preoccupations of the war was, there is no doubt, the Islington Mystery, as the Press called it. It was a striking headline, but the world was too busy to attend. The affair got abroad, so far as it did get abroad, about the time of the first employment of the tanks; and people were trying not to see through the war correspondents, not to perceive that the inky fandangoes and corroborees of these gentlemen hid a sense of failure and disappointment.

IV

But as to the Islington Mystery—this is how it fell out. There is an odd street, not far from the region which was once called Spa Fields, not far from the Pentonville or Islington Fields, where Grimaldi, the clown, was once accused of inciting the mob to chase an over-driven ox. It goes up a steep hill, and the rare adventurer who pierces now and then into this unknown quarter of London is amazed and bewildered at the very outset, since there are no steep hills in the London of his knowledge, and the contours of the scene remind him of the cheap lodging-house area at the back of hilly seaside resorts. But if the site is strange, the buildings on it are far stranger. They were no doubt set up at the high tide of Sir Walter Scott Gothic, which has left such queer memorials behind it. The houses of Lloyd Street are in couples, and the architect, combining the two into one design, desired to create an illusion of a succession of churches, in the Perpendicular or Third Pointed manner, climbing up

the hill. The detail is rich, there are finials to rejoice the heart, and gargoyles of fine fantasy, all carried out in the purest stucco. At the lowest house on the right-hand side lived Mr. Harold Boale and his wife, and a brass plate on the Gothic door said, "Taxidermist: Skeletons Articulated." As it chanced, this lowest house of Lloyd Street has a longer garden than its fellows, giving on a contractor's yard, and at the end of the garden Mr. Boale had set up the apparatus of his craft in an outhouse, away from the noses of his fellow-men.

So far as can be gathered, the stuffer and articulator was a harmless and inoffensive little fellow. His neighbours liked him, and he and the Boule cabinet-maker from next door, the Shell box-maker over the way, the seal engraver and the armourer from Baker Square at the top of the hill, and the old mercantile marine skipper who lived round the corner in Marchmont Street, at the house with the ivory junk in the window, used to spend many a genial evening together in the parlour of the Quill in the days before everything was spoilt by the war. They did not drink very much or talk very much, any of them; but they enjoyed their moderate cups and the snug comfort of the place, and stared solemnly at the old coaching prints that were upon the walls, and at the large glass painting depicting the landing of England's Injured Queen, which hung over the mantelpiece, between two Pink Dogs with gold collars. Mr. Boale passed as a very nice sort of man in this circle, and everybody was sorry for him. Mrs. Boale was a tartar and a scold. The men of the quarter kept out of her way; the women were afraid of her. She led poor Boale the devil's own life. Her voice, often enough, would be heard at the Quill door, vomiting venom at her husband's address; and he, poor man, would tremble and go forth, lest some worse thing might happen. Mrs. Boale was a short dark woman. Her hair was coal black, her face wore an expression of acid malignity, and she walked quickly but

with a decided limp. She was full of energy and the pest of the neighbourhood, and more than a pest to her husband.

The war, with its scarcity and its severe closing hours, made the meetings at the Quill rarer than before, and deprived them of a good deal of their old comfort. Still, the circle was not wholly broken up, and one evening Boale announced that his wife had gone to visit relations in Lancashire, and would most likely be away for a considerable time.

"Well, there's nothing like a change of air, so they say," said the skipper, "though I've had more than enough of it myself."

The others said nothing, but congratulated Boale in their hearts. One of them remarked afterwards that the only change that would do Mrs. Boale good was a change to Kingdom Come, and they all agreed. They were not aware that Mrs. Boale was enjoying the advantages of the recommended treatment.

V

As I recollect, Mr. Boale's worries began with the appearance of Mrs. Boale's sister, Mary Aspinall, a woman almost as ill-tempered and malignant as Mrs. Boale herself. She had been for some years nurse with a family in Capetown, and had come home with her mistress. In the first place, the woman had written two or three letters to her sister, and there had been no reply. This struck her as odd, for Mrs. Boale had been a very good correspondent, filling her letters with "nasty things" about her husband. So, on her first afternoon off after her return, Mary Aspinall called at the house in Lloyd Street to get the truth of the matter from her sister's own lips. She strongly suspected Boale of having suppressed her letters. "The dirty little tike; I'll serve him," she said to herself. So came Miss Aspinall to Lloyd Street and brought out Boale from his workshop. And when he

saw her his heart sank. He had read her letters. But the decision to return to England had been taken suddenly; Miss Aspinall had, therefore, said not a word about it. Boale had thought of his wife's sister as established at the other end of the world for the next ten, twenty years, perhaps; and he meant to go away and lose himself under a new name in a year or two. And so, when he saw the woman, his heart sank.

Mary Aspinall went straight to the point.

"Where's Elizabeth?" she asked. "Upstairs? I wonder she didn't come down when she heard the bell."

"No," said Boale. He comforted himself with the thought of the curious labyrinth he had drawn about his secret; he felt secure in the centre of it.

"No, she's not upstairs. She's not in the house."

"Oh, indeed. Not in the house. Gone to see some friends, I suppose. When do you expect her back?"

"The truth is, Mary, that I don't expect her back. She's left me—three months ago, it is."

"You mean to tell me that! Left you! Showed her sense, I think. Where has she gone?"

"Upon my word, Mary, I don't know. We had a bit of a to-do one evening, though I don't think I said much. But she said she'd had enough, and she packed a few things in a bag, and off she went. I ran after her and called to her to come back, but she wouldn't so much as turn her head, and went off King's Cross way. And from that day to this I've never seen her, nor had a word from her. I've had to send all her letters back to the post-office."

Mary Aspinall stared hard at her brother-in-law and pondered. Beyond telling him that he had brought it on himself, there seemed nothing to say. So she dealt with Boale on those lines very thoroughly, and made an indignant exit from the parlour. He went back to stuff peacocks, for all I know. He was feeling comfortable

again. There had been a very unpleasant sensation in the stomach for a few seconds—a very horrible fear at the moment that one of the outer walls of that labyrinth of his had been breached ; but now all was well again.

And all might have been permanently well if Miss Aspinall had not happened to meet Mrs. Horridge in the main road, close to the bottom of Lloyd Street. Mrs. Horridge was the wife of the Shell box-maker, and the two had met once or twice long ago at Mrs. Boale's tea-table. They recognised each other, and after a few unmeaning remarks, Mrs. Horridge asked Miss Aspinall if she had seen her sister since her return to England.

" How could I see her when I don't know where she is ? " asked Miss Aspinall with some ferocity.

" Dear me ! you haven't seen Mr. Boale, then ? "

" I've just come from him this minute."

" But he can't have lost the Lancashire address, surely ? "

And so one thing led to another, and Mary Aspinall gathered quite clearly that Boale had told his friends that his wife was paying a long visit to relations in Lancashire. In the first place the Aspinalls had no relations in Lancashire—they came from Suffolk—and secondly Boale had informed her that Elizabeth had gone away in a rage, he knew not where. She did not pay him another visit then and there, as she had at first intended. It was growing late, and she took her considerations back with her to Wimbledon, determined on thinking the matter out.

Next week she called again at Lloyd Street. She charged Boale with deliberate lying, placing frankly before him the two tales he had told. Again that horrid sinking sensation lay heavy upon Boale. But he had reserves.

" Indeed," he said, " I've told you no lies, Mary. It all happened just as I said before. But I did make up that tale about Lancashire for the people about here. I didn't like them to have my troubles to talk over, especially

as Elizabeth is bound to come back some time, and I hope it will be soon."

Miss Aspinall stared at the little man in a doubtful, threatening fashion for a moment, and then hurried upstairs. She came down soon afterwards.

" I've gone through Elizabeth's drawers," she said, with defiance. " There's a good many things missing. I don't see those bits of lace she had from Granny, and the set of jet is gone, and so is the garnet necklace, and the coral brooch. I couldn't find the ivory fan, either."

" I found all the drawers wide open after she'd gone," sighed Mr. Boale. " I supposed she'd taken the things away with her."

It must be confessed that Mr. Boale, taught, perhaps, by the nicety of his craft, had paid every attention to detail. He had realised that it would be vain to tell a tale of his wife going away and leaving her treasures behind her. And so the treasures had disappeared.

Really, the Aspinall vixen did not know what to say. She had to confess that Boale had explained the difficulty of his two stories quite plausibly. So she informed him that he was more like a worm than a man, and banged the hall door. Again Boale went back to his workshop with a warmth about his heart. His labyrinth was still secure, its secret safe. At first, when confronted again by the accusing Aspinall, he had thought of bolting the moment he got the woman out of the house ; but that was unreasoning panic. He was in no danger. And he remembered, like the rest of us, the Crippen case. It was running away that had brought Crippen to ruin ; if he had sat tight he would have sat secure, and the secret of the cellar would never have been known. Though, as Mr. Boale reflected, anybody was welcome to search his cellar, to search here and there and anywhere on his premises, from the hall door in front to the workshop at the back. And he proceeded to give his calm, whole-

souled attention to a fine raven that had been sent round in the morning.

Miss Aspinall took the extraordinary disappearance of her sister back with her to Wimbledon and thought it over. She thought it over again and again, and she could make nothing of it. She did not know that people are constantly disappearing for all sorts of reasons; that nobody hears anything about such cases unless some enterprising paper sees matter for a "stunt," and rouses all England to hunt for John Jones or Mrs. Carraway. To Miss Aspinall, the vanishing of Elizabeth Boale seemed a portent and a wonder, a unique and terrible event; and she puzzled her head over it, and still could find no exit from her labyrinth—a different structure from the labyrinth maintained by the serene Boale. The Aspinall had no suspicions of her brother-in-law; both his manner and his matter were straightforward, clear, and square. He was a worm, as she had informed him, but he was certainly telling the truth. But the woman was fond of her sister, and wanted to know where she had gone and what had happened to her; and so she put the matter into the hands of the police.

VI

She furnished the best description that she could of the missing woman, but the officer in charge of the case pointed out that she had not seen her sister for many years, and that Mr. Boale was, obviously, the person to be consulted in the matter. So the taxidermist was again drawn from his scientific labours. He was shown the information laid by Miss Aspinall and the description furnished by her. He told his simple story once more, mentioning the incident of his lying to his neighbours to avoid unpleasant gossip, and added several details to Miss Aspinall's picture of his wife. He then furnished

the constable with two photographs, pointed out the better likeness of the two, and saw his visitor off the premises with cheerful calm.

In due course, the " Missing " bill, garnished with a reproduction of the photograph selected by Mr. Boale, with minute descriptive details, including the " marked limp," was posted up at the police-stations all over the country, and glanced at casually by a few passers-by here and there. There was nothing sensational about the placard ; and the statement, " Last seen going in the direction of King's Cross," was not a very promising clue for the amateur detective. No hint of the matter got into the Press ; as I have pointed out, hardly one per cent. of these cases of " missing " does get into the Press. And just then we were all occupied in reading the pæans of the war correspondents, who were proving that an advance of a mile and a half on a nine-mile front constituted a victory which threw Waterloo into the shade. There was no room for discussing the whereabouts of an obscure woman whom Islington knew no more.

It was sheer accident that brought about the catastrophe. James Curry, a medical student who had rooms in Percy Street, Tottenham Court Road, was prowling about his quarter one afternoon in an indefinite and idle manner, gazing at shop windows and mooning at street corners. He knew that he would never want a cash register, but he inspected the stock with the closest attention, and chose a fine specimen listed at £75. Again, he invested heavily in costly Oriental rugs, and furnished a town mansion in the Sheraton manner at very considerable expense. And so his tour of inspection brought him to the police-station ; and there he proceeded to read the bills posted outside, including the bill relating to Elizabeth Boale.

" Walks with a marked limp."

James Curry felt his breath go out of his body in a swift gasp. He put out a hand towards the railing to

steady himself as he read that amazing sentence over again. And then he walked straight into the police-station.

The fact was that he had bought from Harold Boale, three weeks after the date on which Elizabeth Boale was last seen, a female skeleton. He had got it comparatively cheaply, because of the malformation of one of the thigh bones. And now it struck him that the late owner of that thigh-bone must have walked with a very marked limp.

VII

M'Aulay made his reputation at the trial. He defended Harold Boale with magnificent audacity. I was in court—it was a considerable part of my business in those days to frequent the Old Bailey—and I shall never forget the opening phrases of his speech for the prisoner. He rose slowly, and let his glance go slowly round the court. His eyes rested at last with grave solemnity on the jury. At length he spoke, in a low, clear, deliberate voice, weighing, as it seemed, every word he uttered.

"Gentlemen," he began, "a very great man, and a very wise man, and a very good man once said that probability is the guide of life. I think you will agree with me that this is a weighty utterance. When we once leave the domain of pure mathematics, there is very little that is certain. Supposing we have money to invest: we weigh the pros and cons of this scheme and that, and decide at last on probable grounds. Or it may be our lot to have to make an appointment; we have to choose a man to fill a responsible position, in which both honesty and sagacity are of the first consequence. Again probability must guide us to a decision. No one man can form a certain and infallible judgment of another. And so through all the affairs of life: we must be content with probability, and again and again with probability. Bishop Butler was right.

"But every rule has its exception. The rule which we have just laid down has its exception. That exception confronts you terribly, tremendously, at this very moment. You may think—I do not say that you do think—but you may think that Harold Boale, the prisoner at the bar, in all probability murdered his wife, Elizabeth Boale."

There was a long pause at this point. Then:

"*If* you think that, then it is your imperative duty to acquit the prisoner at the bar. The only verdict which you dare give is a verdict of 'Not Guilty.'"

Up to this moment, Counsel had maintained the low, deliberate utterance with which he had begun his speech, pausing now and again and seeming to consider within himself the precise value of every word that came to his lips. Suddenly his voice rang out, resonant, piercing. One word followed swiftly on another:

"This, remember, is not a court of probability. Bishop Butler's maxim does not apply here. Here there is no place for probability. This is a court of certainty. And unless you are certain that my client is guilty, unless you are as certain of his guilt as you are certain that two and two make four, then you must acquit him.

"Again, and yet again—this is a court of certainty. In the ordinary affairs of life, as we have seen, we are guided by probability. We sometimes make mistakes; in most cases these mistakes may be rectified. A disastrous investment may be counter-balanced by a prosperous investment; a bad servant may be replaced by a good one. But in this place, where life and death hang in the balances which are in your hands, there is no room for mistakes, since here mistakes are irreparable. You cannot bring a dead man back to life. You must not say, 'This man is probably a murderer, and therefore he is guilty.' Before you bring in such a verdict, you must be able to say, 'This man is certainly a murderer.' And *that* you cannot say, and I will tell you why."

M'Aulay then took the evidence piece by piece.

Scientific witnesses had declared that the malformation of the thigh-bone in the skeleton exhibited would produce exactly the sort of limp which had characterised Elizabeth Boale. Counsel for the defence had worried the doctors, had made them admit that such a malformation was by no means unique. It was uncommon. Yes, but not very uncommon? Perhaps not. Finally, one doctor admitted that in the course of thirty years of hospital and private practice he had known of five such cases of malformation of the thigh-bone. M'Aulay gave an inaudible sigh of relief; he felt that he had got his verdict.

He made all this quite clear to the jury. He dwelt on the principle that no one can be condemned unless the *corpus delicti*, the body, or some identifiable portion of the body of the murdered person can be produced. He told them the story of the Campden Wonder; how the "murdered" man walked into his village two years after three people had been hanged for murdering him. "Gentlemen," he said, "for all I know, and for all you know, Elizabeth Boale may walk into this court at any moment. I say boldly that we have no earthly right to assume that she is dead."

Of course Boale's defence was a very simple one. The skeleton which he sold to Mr. Curry had been gradually assembled by him in the course of the last three years. He pointed out that the two hands were not a very good match; and indeed, this was a little detail that he had not overlooked.

The jury took half an hour to consider their verdict. Harold Boale was found "Not Guilty."

He was seen by an old friend a couple of years ago. He had emigrated to America, and was doing prosperously in his old craft in a big town of the Middle West. He had married a pleasant girl of Swedish extraction.

"You see," he explained, "the lawyers told me I should be safe in presuming poor Elizabeth's death."

He smiled amiably.

And, finally, I beg to state that this account of mine is a grossly partial narrative. For all I know, assuming for a moment the severe standards of M'Aulay, Boale was an innocent man. It is possible that his story was a true one. Elizabeth Boale may, after all, be living; she may return after the fashion of the "murdered" man in the Campden Wonder. All the thoughts, devices, meditations that I have put into the heart and mind of Boale may be my own malignant inventions, without the shadow of true substance behind them.

In theory, then, the Islington Mystery is an open question. Certainly; but in fact?

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

By Edgar Wallace

Colonel Chartres Dane lingered irresolutely in the broad and pleasant lobby. Other patients had lingered awhile in that agreeable vestibule. In wintry days it was a cosy place, its polished panelled walls reflecting the gleam of logs that burnt in the open fireplace. There was a shining oak settle that invited gossip, and old prints, and blue china bowls frothing over with the flowers of a belated autumn or advanced springtide, to charm the eye.

In summer it was cool and dark and restful. The mellow tick of the ancient clock, the fragrance of roses, the soft breeze that came through an open casement stirring the lilac curtains uneasily, these corollaries of peace and order had soothed many an unquiet mind.

Colonel Chartres Dane fingered a button of his light dust-coat, and his thin patrician face was set in thought. He was a spare man of fifty-five; a man of tired eyes and nervous gesture.

Dr. Merriget peered at him through his powerful spectacles and wondered.

It was an awkward moment, for the doctor had murmured his sincere, if conventional, regrets and encouragements, and there was nothing left but to close the door on his patient.

"You have had a bad wound there, Mr. Jackson," he said, by way of changing a very gloomy subject and filling in the interval of silence. This intervention might

call to mind in a soldier some deed of his ; some far field of battle where men met death with courage and fortitude. Such memories might be helpful to a man under sentence.

Colonel Dane fingered the long scar on his cheek.

" Yes," he said absently, " a child did that—my niece. Quite my own fault."

" A child ? " Dr. Merriget appeared to be shocked. He was, in reality, very curious.

" Yes . . . she was eleven . . . my own fault. I spoke disrespectfully of her father. It was unpardonable, for he was only recently dead. He was my brother-in-law. We were at breakfast, and she threw the knife . . . yes . . ."

He ruminated on the incident, and a smile quivered at the corner of his thin lips.

" She hated me. She hates me still . . . yes . . ."

He waited.

The doctor was embarrassed, and came back to the object of the visit.

" I should be ever so much more comfortable in my mind if you saw a specialist, Mr.—er—Jackson. You see how difficult it is for me to give an opinion ? I may be wrong. I know nothing of your history, your medical history, I mean. There are so many men in town who could give you a better and more valuable opinion than I. A country practitioner like myself is rather in a backwater. One has the usual cases that come to one in a small country town, maternity cases, commonplace ailments . . . it is difficult to keep abreast of the extraordinary developments in medical science. . . ."

" Do you know anything about Machonicies College ? " asked the colonel unexpectedly.

" Yes, of course." The doctor was surprised. " It is one of the best of the technical schools. Many of our best doctors and chemists take a preparatory course there. Why ? "

" I merely asked. As to your specialists . . . I hardly think I shall bother them."

Dr. Merriget watched the tall figure striding down the red-tiled path between the banked flowers, and was still standing on the doorstep when the whine of his visitor's machine had gone beyond the limits of his hearing.

" H'm," said Dr. Merriget, as he returned to his study. He sat awhile thinking.

" Mr. Jackson ? " he said aloud. " I wonder why the colonel calls himself ' Mr. Jackson ' ? "

He had seen the colonel two years before at a garden-party, and had an excellent memory for faces.

He gave the matter no further thought, having certain packing to superintend; he was on the eve of his departure for Constantinople—a holiday trip he had promised himself for years.

On the following afternoon at Machonicies Technical School a lecture was in progress.

" . . . by this combustion you have secured true K.c.y., which we will now test and compare with the laboratory quantities . . . a deliquescent and colourless crystal extremely soluble. . . ."

The master, whose monotonous voice droned like the hum of a distant big stationary blue-bottle, was a middle-aged man to whom life was no more than a chemical reaction, and love not properly a matter for his observation or knowledge. He had an idea that it was dealt with effectively in another department of the college . . . metaphysics . . . or was it philosophy ? Or maybe it came into the realms of the Biological master.

Ella Grant glared resentfully at the crystals which glittered on the blue paper before her, and snapped out the bunsen burner with a vicious twist of finger and thumb. Newman always overshot the hour. It was a quarter-past five ! The pallid clock above the daïs where Professor Denman stood seemed to mock her impatience.

She sighed wearily, and fiddled with the apparatus on the bench at which she sat. Some twenty other white-coated girls were also fiddling with test-tubes and bottles and graduated measures, and twenty pairs of eyes glowered at the bald and stooping man who, unconscious of the passing of time, was turning affectionately to the properties of potassium. . . .

" Here we have a metal whose strange affinity for oxygen . . . eh, Miss Benson? . . . five? Bless my soul, so it is! Class is dismissed. And ladies, *ladies, ladies!* Please, please let me make myself heard. The laboratory keeper will take from you all chemicals you have drawn for this experiment. . . ."

They were crowding toward the door to the change room. Smith, the laboratory man, stood in the entrance grabbing wildly at little green and blue bottles that were thrust at him, and vainly endeavouring by a private system of mnemonics to commit his receipts to memory.

" Miss Fairlie, phial fairly; Miss Jones, bottle bones; Miss Walter, bottle salter . . ."

If at the end of his collection he failed to recall a rhyme to any name, the owner had passed without cashing in.

" Miss Grant . . .? "

The laboratory of the Analytical Class was empty. Nineteen bottles stood on a shelf, and he reviewed them.

" Miss Grant . . .? "

No, he had said nothing about " aunt " or " can't " or " pant."

He went into the change room, opened a locker, and felt in the pockets of the white overall. They were empty. Returning to the laboratory, he wrote in his report book:

" Miss Grant did not return experiment bottle."

He spelt experiment with two r's and two m's.

Ella found the bottle in the pocket of her overall as she was hanging it up in the long cupboard of the change room. She hesitated a moment, frowning resent-

fully at the little blue phial in her hand, and rapidly calculating the time it would take to return to the laboratory to find the keeper and restore the property. In the end, she pushed it into her bag and hurried from the building. It was not an unusual occurrence that a student overlooked the return of some apparatus, and it could be restored in the morning.

Had Jack succeeded? That was the thought which occupied her. The miracle about which every junior dreams had happened. Engaged in the prosecution of the notorious Flackman, his leader had been taken ill, and the conduct of the case for the State had fallen to him. He was opposed by two brilliant advocates, and the judge was a notorious humanitarian.

She did not stop to buy a newspaper; she was in a fret at the thought that Jack Freeder might not have waited for her, and she heaved a sigh of relief when she turned into the old-world garden of the court-house and saw him pacing up and down the flagged walk, his hands in his pockets.

"I am so sorry. . . ."

She had come up behind him, and he turned on his heel to meet her. His face spoke success. The elation in it told her everything she wanted to know, and she slipped her arm through his with a queer mingled sense of pride and uneasiness.

". . . the judge sent for me to his room afterwards, and told me that the attorney could not have conducted the case better than I."

"He is guilty?" she asked, hesitating.

"Who? Flackman? . . . I suppose so," he said carelessly. "His pistol was found in Sinnit's apartment, and it was known that he quarrelled with Sinnit about money, and there was a girl in it, I think, although we have never been able to get sufficient proof of that to put her into the box. You seldom have direct evidence in cases of this character, Ella, and in many ways circum-

stantial evidence is infinitely more damning. If a witness went into the box and said: 'I saw Flackman shoot Sinnit and saw Sinnit die,' the whole case would stand or fall by the credibility of that evidence; prove that witness an habitual liar, and there is no chance of a conviction. On the other hand, when there are six or seven witnesses, all of whom subscribe to some one act or appearance or location of a prisoner, and all agreeing . . . why, you have him."

She nodded.

Her acquaintance with Jack Freeder had begun on her summer vacation, and had begun romantically but unconventionally, when a sailing-boat overturned with its occupant pinned beneath the bulging canvas. It was Ella, a magnificent swimmer who, bathing, had seen the accident and had dived into the sea to the assistance of the drowning man.

"This means a lot to me, Ella," he said earnestly, as they turned into the busy street. "It means the foundation of a new life."

His eyes met hers, and lingered for a second, and she was thrilled.

"Did you see Stephanie last night?" he asked suddenly.

She felt guilty.

"No," she admitted, "but I don't think you ought to worry about that, Jack. Stephanie is expecting the money almost by any mail."

"She has been expecting the money almost by any mail for a month past," he said drily, "and in the meantime this infernal note is becoming due. What I can't understand . . ."

She interrupted him with a laugh.

"You can't understand why they accepted my signature as a guarantee for Stephanie's," she laughed, "and you are extremely uncomplimentary!"

Stephanie Boston, her sometime room-mate, and now

her apartmental neighbour, was a source of considerable worry to Jack Freeder, although he had only met her once. A handsome, volatile girl, with a penchant for good clothes and a mode of living out of all harmony with the meagre income she drew from fashion-plate artistry, she had found herself in difficulties. It was a condition which the wise had long predicted, and Ella, not so wise, had dreaded. And then one day the young artist had come to her with an oblong slip of paper, and an incoherent story of somebody being willing to lend her money if Ella would sign her name, and Ella Grant, to whom finance was an esoteric mystery, had cheerfully complied.

" If you were a great heiress, or you were expecting a lot of money coming to you through the death of a relative," persisted Jack with a frown, " I could understand Isaacs being satisfied with your acceptance ; but you aren't ! "

Ella laughed softly and shook her head.

" The only relative I have in the world is poor dear Uncle Chartres, who loathes me ! I used to loathe him, too, but I've got over that. After daddy died I lived with him for a few months, but we quarrelled over—over —well, I won't tell you what it was about, because I am sure he was sorry. I had a fiendish temper as a child, and I threw a knife at him."

" Good lord ! " gasped Jack, staring at her.

She nodded solemnly.

" I did—so you see there is very little likelihood of Uncle Chartres, who is immensely rich, leaving me anything more substantial than the horrid weapon with which I attempted to slay him ! "

Jack was silent. Isaacs was a professional moneylender . . . he was not a philanthropist.

When Ella got home that night she determined to perform an unpleasant duty. She had not forgotten Jack Freeder's urgent insistence upon her seeing Stephanie Boston—she had simply avoided the unpalatable.

Stephanie's flat was on the first floor ; her own was

immediately above. She considered for a long time before she pressed the bell.

Grace, Stephanie's elderly maid, opened the door, and her eyes were red with recent weeping.

"What is the matter?" asked Ella in alarm.

"Come in, miss," said the servant miserably. "Miss Boston left a letter for you."

"Left?" repeated Ella wonderingly. "Has she gone away?"

"She was gone when I came this morning. The bailiffs have been here. . . ."

Ella's heart sank.

The letter was short but eminently lucid:

I am going away, Ella. I do hope that you will forgive me. That wretched bill has become due, and I simply cannot face you again. I will work desperately hard to repay you, Ella . . .

The girl stared at the letter, not realising what it all meant. Stephanie had gone away!

"She took all her clothes, miss. She left this morning, and told the porter she was going into the country; and she owes me three weeks' wages!"

Ella went upstairs to her own flat, dazed and shaken. She herself had no maid; a woman came every morning to clean the flat, and Ella had her meals at a neighbouring restaurant.

As she made the last turn of the stairs she was conscious that there was a man waiting on the landing above, with his back to her door. Though she did not know him, he evidently recognised her, for he raised his hat. She had a dim idea that she had seen him somewhere before, but for the moment could not recollect the circumstances.

"Good-evening, Miss Grant," he said amiably. "I think we have met before. Miss Boston introduced me—name of Higgins."

She shook her head.

"I am afraid I don't remember you," she said, and wondered whether his business was in connection with Stephanie's default.

"I brought the paper up that you signed about three months ago."

Then she recalled him, and went cold.

"Mr. Isaacs didn't want to make any kind of trouble," he said. "The bill became due a week ago, and we have been trying to get Miss Boston to pay. As it is, it looks very much as though you will have to find the money."

"When?" she asked in dismay.

"Mr. Isaacs will give you until to-morrow night," said the man. "I have been waiting here since five o'clock to see you. I suppose it is convenient, miss?"

Nobody knew better than Mr. Isaacs' clerk that it would be most inconvenient, not to say impossible, for Ella Grant to produce four hundred pounds.

"I will write to Mr. Isaacs," she said, finding her voice at last.

She sat down in the solitude and dusk of her flat to think things out. She was overwhelmed, numbed by the tragedy. To owe money that she could not pay was to Ella Grant an unspeakable horror.

There was a letter in the letter-box. She had taken it out mechanically when she came in, and as mechanically slipped her fingers through the flap and extracted a folded paper. But she put it down without so much as a glance at its contents.

What would Jack say? What a fool she had been, what a perfectly reckless fool! She had met difficulties before, and had overcome them. When she had left her uncle's house as a child of fourteen and had subsisted on the slender income which her father had left her, rejecting every attempt on the part of Chartres Dane to leave the home of an invalid maiden aunt where she had

taken refuge, she had faced what she believed was the supreme crisis of life.

But this was different.

Chartres Dane! She rejected the thought instantly, only to find it recurring. Perhaps he would help. She had long since overcome any ill-feeling she had towards him, for whatever dislike she had, had been replaced by a sense of shame and repentance. She had often been on the point of writing him to beg his forgiveness, but had stopped short at the thought that he might imagine she had some ulterior motive in seeking to return to his good graces. He was her relative. He had some responsibility . . . again the thought inserted itself, and suddenly she made up her mind.

Chartres Dane's house lay twelve miles out of town, a great rambling place set on the slopes of a wooded hill, a place admirably suited to his peculiar love of solitude.

She had some difficulty in finding a taxi-driver who was willing to make the journey, and it had grown dark, though a pale light still lingered in the western skies, when she descended from the cab at the gateway of Hevel House. There was a lodge at the entrance of the gate, but this had long since been untenanted. She found her way up the long drive to the columned portico in front of the house. The place was in darkness, and she experienced a pang of apprehension. Suppose he was not there? (Even if he were, he would not help her, she told herself.) But the possibility of his being absent, however, gave her courage.

Her hand was on the bell when there came to her a flash of memory. At such an hour he would be sitting in the window recess overlooking the lawn at the side of the house. She had often seen him there on warm summer nights, his glass of port on the broad window-ledge, a cigar clenched between his white teeth, brooding out into the darkness.

She came down the steps, and walking on the close-cropped grass bordering the flower-beds, came slowly, almost stealthily, to the library window. The big casement was wide open; a faint light showed within, and she stopped dead, her heart beating a furious rataplan at the sight of a filled glass on the window-ledge. His habits had not changed, she thought; he himself would be sitting just out of sight from where she stood, in that little window recess which was nearest to her. Summoning all her courage, she advanced still further. He was not in his customary place, and she crept nearer to the window.

Colonel Chartres Dane was sitting at a large writing-table in the centre of the room; his back was toward her, and he was writing by the light of two tall candles that stood upon the table.

At the sight of his back all her courage failed, and as he rose from the table she shrank back into the shadow. She saw his white hand take up the glass of wine, and after a moment, peeping again, she saw him, still with his back to her, put it on the table by him as he sat down again.

She could not do it, she dare not do it, she told herself, and turned away sorrowfully. She would write to him.

She had stepped from the grass to the path when a man came from an opening in the bushes and gripped her arm.

"Hullo," he said, "who are you, and what are you doing here?"

"Let me go," she cried, frightened, "I—I——"

"What are you doing by the colonel's window?"

"I am his niece," she said, trying to recover some of her dignity.

"I thought you might be his aunt," said the gamekeeper ironically. "Now, my girl, I am going to take you in to the colonel——"

With a violent thrust she pushed him from her; the man stumbled and fell. She heard a thud and a groan, and stood rooted to the spot with horror.

"Have I hurt you?" she whispered. There was no reply.

She felt, rather than saw, that he had struck his head against a tree in falling, and, turning, she flew down the drive, terrified, nearly fainting in her fright. The cabman saw her as she flung open the gate and rushed out.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"I—I think I have killed a man," she said incoherently, and then from the other end of the drive she heard a thick voice cry:

"Stop that girl."

It was the voice of the gamekeeper, and for a moment the blood came back to her heart.

"Take me away, quickly, quickly," she cried.

The cabman hesitated.

"What have you been doing?" he asked.

"Take—take me away," she pleaded.

Again he hesitated.

"Jump in," he said gruffly.

Three weeks later John Penderbury, one of the greatest advocates at the Bar, walked into Jack Freeder's chambers.

The young man sat at his table, his head on his arm, and Penderbury put his hand lightly upon the shoulders of the stricken man.

"You've got to take a hold of yourself, Freeder," he said kindly. "You will neither help yourself nor her by going under."

Jack lifted a white, haggard face to the lawyer.

"It is horrible, horrible," he said huskily. "She's as innocent as a baby. What evidence have they?"

"My dear good fellow," said Penderbury, "the only evidence worth while in a case like this is circumstantial evidence. If there were direct evidence we might test the credibility of the witness. But in circumstantial evidence every piece of testimony dovetails into the other; each witness creates one strand of the net."

"It is horrible, it is impossible, it is madness to think that Ella could——"

Penderbury shook his head. Pulling up a chair at the other side of the table, he sat down, his arms folded, his grave eyes fixed on the younger man.

"Look at it from a lawyer's point of view, Freeder," he said gently. "Ella Grant is badly in need of money. She has backed a bill for a girl friend, and the money is suddenly demanded. A few minutes after learning this from Isaacs' clerk she finds a letter in her flat, which she has obviously read—the envelope was opened and its contents extracted—a letter which is from Colonel Dane's lawyers, telling her that the colonel has made her his sole heiress. She knows, therefore, that the moment the colonel dies she will be a rich woman. She has in her handbag a bottle containing cyanide of potassium, and that night, under the cover of darkness, drives to the colonel's house and is seen outside the library window by Colonel Dane's gamekeeper. She admitted, when she was questioned by the detective, that she knew the colonel was in the habit of sitting by the window, and that he usually put his glass of port on the window-ledge. What was easier than to drop a fatal dose of cyanide into the wine? Remember, she admitted that she had hated him, and that once she threw a knife at him, wounding him, so that the scar remained to the day of his death. She admitted herself that it was his practice to put the wine where she could have reached it."

He drew a bundle of papers from his pocket, unfolded them, and turned the leaves rapidly.

" Here it is," and he read :

Yes, I saw a glass of wine on the window-ledge. The colonel was in the habit of sitting in the window on summer evenings. I have often seen him there, and I knew when I saw the wine that he was near at hand.

He pushed the paper aside and looked keenly at the wretched man before him.

" She is seen by the gamekeeper, as I say," he went on, " and this man attempting to intercept her, she struggles from his grasp and runs down the drive to the cab. The cabman says she was agitated, and when he asked her what was the matter, she replied that she had killed a man——"

" She meant the gamekeeper," interrupted Jack.

" She may or may not, but she made that statement. There are the facts, Jack ; you cannot get past them. The letter from the lawyers—which she says she never read—the envelope was found open and the letter taken out ; is it likely that she had not read it ? The bottle of cyanide of potassium was found in her possession, and "—he spoke deliberately—" the colonel was found dead at his desk, and death was due to cyanide of potassium. A candle which stood on his desk had been overturned by him in his convulsions, and the first intimation the servants had that anything was wrong was the sight of the blazing papers on the table, which the gamekeeper saw, when he returned to report what had occurred in the grounds. There is no question what verdict the jury will return."

It was a great and a fashionable trial. The court-house was crowded, and the public had fought for a few places that were vacant in the gallery.

Sir Johnson Grey, the Attorney-General, was to lead for the prosecution, and Penderbury had Jack Freeder as his junior.

The opening trial was due for ten o'clock, but it was half-past ten when the Attorney-General and Penderbury came into the court, and there was a light in Penderbury's eyes and a smile on his lips which amazed his junior.

Jack had only glanced once at the pale, slight prisoner. He dared not look at her.

"What is the delay?" he asked irritably. "This infernal Judge is always late."

At that moment the court rose as the Judge came on to the Bench, and almost immediately afterwards the Attorney-General was addressing the court.

"My lord," he said, "I do not purpose offering any evidence in this case on behalf of the Crown. Last night I received from Dr. Merriget, an eminent practitioner of Townville, a sworn statement on which I purpose examining him.

"Dr. Merriget," the Attorney-General went on, "has been travelling in the Near East, and a letter which was sent to him by the late Colonel Dane only reached him a week ago, coincident with the doctor learning that these proceedings had been taken against the prisoner at the Bar.

"Dr. Merriget immediately placed himself in communication with the Crown officers of the law, as a result of which I am in a position to tell your lordship that I do not intend offering evidence against Ella Grant.

"Apparently Colonel Dane had long suspected that he was suffering from an incurable disease, and to make sure, he went to Dr. Merriget and submitted himself to an examination. The reason for his going to a strange doctor is that he did not want to have it known that he had been consulting specialists in town. The doctor confirmed his worst fears, and Colonel Dane returned to his home. Whilst on the Continent, the doctor received a letter from Colonel Dane, which I purpose reading."

He took a letter from the table, adjusted his spectacles, and read :

Dear Dr. Merriget,

It occurred to me after I had left you the day before yesterday that you must have identified me, for I have a dim recollection that we met at a garden-party. I am not, as you suggested, taking any other advice. I know too well that this fibrous growth is beyond cure, and I purpose to-night taking a fatal dose of cyanide of potassium. I feel that I must notify you in case by a mischance there is some question as to how I met my death.

Very sincerely yours,

Chartres Dane.

" I feel that the ends of justice will be served," continued the Attorney-General, " if I call the doctor. . . ."

It was not very long before another Crown case came the way of Jack Freeder. A week after his return from his honeymoon he was sent for to the Public Prosecutor's office, and that gentleman interviewed him.

" You did so well in the Flackman case, Freeder, that I want you to undertake the prosecution of Wise. Undoubtedly you will gain kudos in a trial of this description, for the Wise case has attracted a great deal of attention."

" What is the evidence ? " asked Jack bluntly.

" Circumstantial, of course," said the Public Prosecutor, " but——"

Jack shook his head.

" I think not, sir," he said firmly, but respectfully. " I will not prosecute in another case of murder, unless the murder is committed in my presence."

The Public Prosecutor stared at him.

" That means you will never take another murder prosecution. Have you given up criminal work, Mr. Freeder ? "

"Yes, sir," said Jack gravely, "my wife doesn't like it."

To-day Jack Freeder is referred to in legal circles as a glaring example of how a promising career can be ruined by marriage.

THE PRINCE

By W. B. Maxwell

In the little suburban slum between the railway and the river they called him indifferently "The Prince," "Prince Charles," or "Long Charlie."

He was a lean, tall, limping blackguard; and at fifty years of age, with a leg stiffened by rheumatism, with his hawk nose broadened and swollen, his fierce eyes clouded and sometimes red at their rims, he showed but little of the clear-cut beauty that in youth had started his triumphs over the fairer sex. Nevertheless he still had an air. Some quality of princeliness was still perceived by his inferiors. The costers, rag-pickers, and other riff-raff that formed the population of the river lane all bowed down before him.

Ever since adolescence he had lived upon women. As soon as he wooed and conquered one of them, he made her cook for him, sweep for him, and if necessary beg or steal for him. If she was troublesome he hit her. He did not do it as you or I would hit a woman, doubtfully and hesitatingly. He let fly. In lighter moments it was the back of his hand across her mouth, so that she abruptly seated herself on the pavement, bleeding and sobbing; but if really incensed he drove with his right fist, and then the pavement seemed all soft as it rose to meet her, and she lay huddled, face-downwards, unconscious. He allowed her to lie there until he wanted to move on. Then he stirred her with his boot. She got up, tottered,

and followed him. For these and other reasons women loved him.

But a man, even though he is a prince, must have some visible means of support. Pride demands that he shall appear to earn a livelihood. Prince Charlie hawked pot-plants, limping after old ladies, bullying them, too, if he caught them unprotected, and he also cadged round the offices of all the charitable organisations of the suburb. He was known to the police and in the past had been watched by them, but they now disregarded him as mere trash.

At present his companion was a fine, strong, black-haired young woman named Maggie. They said that she had been an organ-grinder's girl and that there was Italian blood in her. If you washed her and made her tidy, she looked diabolically handsome. One of Maggie's own methods of washing was to take a dip in the river at dawn, or just before it. She ran down the lane and plunged.

The dark stream was almost invisible; the shadows beneath the poplars on the island, the barges, the further shore, were dark as death; but the white stone bridge seemed to be made of ivory and opals, and it glimmered faintly as the first arrows of light struck it. The tale up and down the lane was that she swam stark naked. She was a good swimmer.

With the prince she proved passionate and adoring. She worshipped him. It was the devil in her that had taken his fancy and made him woo her. But the first time he wanted to chastise her she wouldn't have any.

It was up in their bedroom, with the window open to a gentle summer night, just above the lean-to shed and the rabbit hutches of their neighbour.

"None of that, my lad," said Maggie. Quick as lightning she had snatched up a bottle and she promised to bash him with it, to split the glass all over his face.

"Put away that bottle."

" Not much."

" Put away that bottle," repeated the prince.

" Then do you promise not to touch me ? "

" Yes."

" On your honour, Charlie ? "

" Yes."

The moment she relinquished the bottle he knocked her down, of course. They got on well after this. Except for occasional tantrums, a fit of ugly temper once in a way, she was a sweet and docile helpmate. No one had ever worked harder for him than she did.

A good blackmailing lay of theirs was getting her clean and neat, and putting her out in service as housekeeper to some innocent old gentleman. Few old gentlemen could resist her personality, and as soon as they showed any interest in it she made a false accusation. Then the prince pulled a locked trunk from under his bed, put on a comparatively decent suit of clothes, and went to the house as the injured husband. They made the victim pay. If he was the sort of genuinely nice old gentleman of whom his friends say they would never have believed it, he paid handsomely.

A good lay ! The prince, rolling in hush-money, for a little while resumed his full princehood. He bought a new suit of clothes, frequented the tavern that was used by the bookmakers, went to Kempton Park with a train-load of the unspeakable scoundrels that our noble English sport attracts and maintains. Night after night the bedroom was afloat with liquor—black-browed Maggie filling the glasses, the prince and two pals playing cards on the bed, and a smutty-faced girl from the barges making music with a concertina. It was frightfully jolly up in the bedroom. And if you felt sick, there was always the window.

When the company left, Maggie was eager to embrace him, hungry for caresses.

" Oh, it's lovely to be 'ome agin with you, Charlie."

She loved him more and more.

Yet so perverse is the human heart, so limitless the ingratitude of princes, that he could not be true to her.

The other woman was a sort of taproom assistant at a public-house close to the gasworks and some orchards that now lay derelict. After making her acquaintance, he used to hang about this bit of waste ground and the neighbouring roads, forgetting dinner-time in his desire for her, much as a dog will prowl insatiable along the garden walls that hide a female of his race.

She was a big blonde. She had pallid blue eyes, a wide loose mouth with a gap in the teeth that made her lisp, and her age was uncertain—even to herself. Why was he caught by her? How could he possibly prefer her, a stupid lump, to that creature of mingled fire and fidelity? Contrast. Because of her lighter colour. Another piece of flesh, "with a different smell to it," as he might have said himself.

He soon suspected that Maggie had discovered the intrigue. In order to obtain freedom with his charmer, he manœuvred Maggie to the seaside on their lay; and the evening after her departure he took the other home with him.

They were seated upon the bed, holding each other's hands, when Maggie turned up very unexpectedly.

He was furious as well as disconcerted, but tried to pass it off in princely fashion.

"It's all right, Mag. I asked her upstairs to have a drink."

"Then why has she brought her leather bag?" And Maggie, snatching it open, pulled out a nightdress. "It's all right, yes. . . . Charlie asked you to come up the stairs. And I ask you to go down 'em—bloody quick, too."

When Charlie returned after escorting the intruder and carrying the violated bag for her, he found Maggie

lying on the bed and crying as if her heart would break.

"Oh, Charlie, Charlie," she wailed despairingly, "I can't bear it. . . . Not this. You might have knocked me about—you could have done what you liked with me, but not this. . . . Oh, Prince, say you'll give her up."

He said so. He promised to give her up; and in due course he broke his promise. Once more Maggie knew. Instinctively, mysteriously, she divined the fresh betrayal.

"You've bin with that woman agin. You can't deny it."

Then a dreadful noisy scene ensued, nearly all the noise being made by Maggie. She was terrible in her passion. She frightened him. She tore her black hair; she raved, calling upon the shades of her Italian ancestry and imploring heaven to strike her dead there where she stood if she didn't send him to kingdom-come for it. Before she had done he was trembling and stammering and meekly begging forgiveness. For the first time in his long disgraceful career one of the worms had turned. A woman had scared him.

He went out and strolled along the tow-path, feeling thoroughly upset.

Some hours later, when Maggie was absent from their room, he pulled the battered old trunk from beneath the bed and groped under all the garments and indescribable odds and ends in it for something that he kept right at the bottom—a revolver and some cartridges wrapped in oily rags. They weren't there. They were gone. Strangely, mysteriously, someone had got at them and taken them. The perspiration broke out on the back of his neck. Maggie?

When he came home that night fear was with him; quivering, disconcerting fear, fear that had pangs deeper than rheumatism, and nauseous qualms as distressful as alcoholic sickness. There were horrid places in that lane for a threatened man to pass—corners of walls, dark entries, alley-ways as black as pitch. He ran by some

of them, limpingly but swiftly. At home he crept up the stairs on all fours, waiting a few moments at each tread. When he opened the bedroom door he flung it right back and stepped aside.

But the bedroom was empty. Maggie was not there. She did not come back that night, nor next day. She did not come back at all.

Yet the fear remained with him. Maggie's absence was too mysterious, too sinister. It got on his nerves.

On an evening in the autumn he had the other woman in his room once more. Old as he was, he wanted to go to Canada. He wanted her to go with him, but she didn't take kindly to the notion. As he stood by the window pleading with her, it seemed to him suddenly that Maggie, or her ghost, was in the room. He moved hastily from the window, and it seemed to him then that Maggie was on the stairs. Maggie was outside too, waiting for him. Maggie was all round the house.

"Come on. Clear out of this," he said brutally. "D'ye hear? Go down ahead of me—an' see that there's nobody down there. Then give me the signal, an' I'll foller."

The woman went down, and standing below the window called up to him softly.

He came down himself and made her precede him by a dozen paces as they went up the lane. She did not see the motionless figure in one of the entries, and, whatever the sensations of that watcher, she was allowed to pass.

Then as the prince came abreast, an explosion shook the walls. The revolver made as much noise in that narrow space as if it had been a shell bursting. Three shots were fired, and before the third of them twenty people had come out of their houses.

"Stop her," screamed his lady-love. "She's killed him."

But already men were in chase. They had seen her

running down the lane. She ran right down the lane and plunged into the river.

The men peered and shouted, but could not see a sign of her. There were things like her in the black flood as it rolled by, but not her. A bargee hung a lantern over the side of his barge, and its reflection, from the bank, looked like a dead face.

No one ever saw her again. Had her clothes drowned her, or had she succeeded in swimming across to the Middlesex shore and getting clear away? She was a good swimmer.

THE SMILE OF KAREN

By Oliver Onions

(To June)

I

Although the sleigh had come to a standstill, I do not think that half the people in it had any idea of what was happening. All that they seemed to hear, besides their own cheerful voices, was the dull rush of the torrent below and a little clamour of bells whenever a horse moved his head. But another sound, a leisurely "Cric-cric, cric-cric," had seemed to me to grow more formidable every moment, and I had climbed out of the sleigh and was watching the man who was the cause of it.

We could hardly have come upon the timber-cart at a more perilous spot. The road at that point, besides being deep in snow, was not more than ten feet wide, and the timber-cart had the right to the inside berth, the one with the sheer face of precipitous rock that seemed to rise to the skies. Only a low parapet separated the sleigh from the abyss of tree-tops below. The problem was how to pass.

The largest tree was sixty feet if it was an inch, and if that could be cleared all would be well. It was against the tree that the young man in the velvet jacket and voluminous corduroys had set the jack. Without haste, a pound or so at a time, he was slowly pumping power into it, with the wall of rock to take the resistance.

I learned soon enough that he could neither read nor write. This that he was doing was his revelation of himself, his signature upon the world. A slip of the jack, a fragment of ice, a faltering of the man's nerve, and there was no second chance. He knew it, and he, his task, and the way he set himself to it, made on me an impression of fatalistic beauty that has never left me.

Imperceptibly, relentlessly, the tree became bowed like a catapult. At every grind it gave on the rock's face my heart leaped into my mouth. But he only stepped back once or twice to see how much more there was to do, and then bent to the ratchet again. The handsome black brows under the black wideawake were hardly knitted.

"Cric-cric, cric-cric, cric-cric——" Still he went on, though the tree could have whisked us into the abyss as easily as a finger flicks a pea.

"Cric-cric, cric-cric, cric-cric——"

And even did he bend the tree sufficiently to allow the sleigh to pass he still had the task of rendering the dreadful engine harmless again.

We did pass, or I should not be writing about Walther Blum. The passengers did not resume their chatter, because they had barely interrupted it. An hour later we had arrived at our destination, but I confess that my dreams that night were of elemental things—of masses and weights and forces and how man tames the devils that abide in them. I was haunted by thoughts of the precarious margins of safety by which we live, and by the still more precarious assumption, that a man will never fail of having himself in control. And above all, there seemed to hang between me and the night a slightish figure in a black velvet jacket and baggy corduroys, with handsome dark brows over dark fatalistic eyes, who himself seemed to possess something of that very inimicality of the Nature against which he wrought. As

long as things went well he held, as a dam holds ; but if they went ill he was himself a tree to break, with a dreadful sound, a rock to come thundering down.

II

It has more than once happened to me that a powerfully received impression has been followed almost immediately by another one, as if in some way I myself were specially attuned and open to it. I am of a restless disposition, and did not propose to make any long stay in Haarheim ; and if Walther Blum (as I presently learned his name to be) had made such an impression on me, and was indeed a timber-carrier, well, these fellows spend three-quarters of their lives on the road, and the chances were that I should never see him again. But I did see him again, and, as it happened, within a couple of nights of that perilous exploit of his with the jack.

I am permitted a moderate amount of walking, though not " winter sports " ; and as hotel life has long since lost its attraction for me, I like to turn my back on the ringing *eisbahn* and to seek the higher slopes, where the clearings and the sawmills are, and the hydraulic mains lean on the mountains like rods against a wall, and, higher still, where the kites circle, and a thousand trees can be cut and the face of the landscape is hardly changed. With the close of the season the hotels shut down ; direction and staff and clientèle move elsewhere ; but the timbermen and the men of the power-stations and the cattlemen and sawyers remain. In the meantime their wives sweep the floors and carry the pails and make the beds at the hotels.

It was in these high regions that I saw Walther Blum again. And I say that I saw him at night, though in that electricity-flooded country of snowy tops and wooded scarps, " artificial day " would serve as well, since they

hold midnight carnivals on the *eisbahn* under the great sputtering arcs, while frequently lights burn unheeded at noon. There was, in fact, a carnival that night, and I relied on its illumination to guide me home again, for to tell the truth, I had no very clear idea where I was. It was in order to ascertain this that I was making towards another light, along a rough, snowy track that skirted a clearing.

The light was a sort of blurred square, as if the window was draped with some curtain-stuff, and as I drew nearer I saw that it came from the window of a house or hut of logs, apparently of two rooms that communicated. The communicating door must have been open, for a remnant of light was visible in the second window also. And then I saw what it was that veiled the first window. They were icicles. They made another bloated pane outside the inner one, some of them three fingers thick, others mere films, as if it had thawed and blown a gale and frozen again simultaneously, and one liquefying finger had passed its drops on to the next. This shutter of ice gave the place an uncared-for look, for it could have been cleared away in a couple of minutes, and even the light within was no certain indication that there was anybody there. I therefore approached the window before knocking at the door.

I dimly saw that a hatted man sat inside at a table, alone. The naked incandescent was immediately above his head, and he appeared to be moving something smoothly and regularly a few inches along the table, to and fro. The rest was a mere distorted blur, through which it was impossible that he should have seen me, and I turned away quietly enough; but suddenly I heard the moving of his chair and his voice that called.

"Is that you, Karen?"

The next moment the door was flung open and I stood full in the light.

In the German I make shift with I told him that I had missed my way and would be grateful if he would direct me to the Haarheim Palast. He stood aside to allow me to enter.

"Come in," he said, and he closed the door behind me.

It was a rough and neglected interior, and it gave the impression of having been shut up for some time. The walls were of yellow pine, and there was probably an air-space between them and the outer logs. The furniture consisted of the table I had seen, a couple of chairs, a sort of home-made settee with blankets and a great-coat on it, a rack of crockery, a stopped fretwork clock, and the stove. There was not as much as a print on the walls, but ranged along a narrow shelf were the usual trifles in carved wood—paper-knives, boxes, blotters, toy cattle, a bear, and the rest of the things people buy in the picture-postcard shops and bring home as mementoes. To make these things was evidently his way of passing the evenings, as indeed the litter on the table showed, for the light shone down on a handful of chisels and a small saw; and, mingled with chips and sawdust, on a newspaper he couldn't read, stood a loaf of black bread and half a sausage. The oilstone was there too, for the smooth, regular movement I had seen through the icicled window had been the sharpening of his penknife.

He showed no sign of recognising me as the passenger who had got out of the sleigh to watch him at work with the jack. He had taken off his wide hat, and its removal showed a broad brow beneath thick rumpled hair, the low growth of which made more emphatic still the handsomeness of his brows. His youthful face—he could not have been more than five or six-and-twenty—was weathered to a clear even brown, and possibly he shaved twice a week or so, for his small moustache was continued downwards in a soft smudge, which seemed to give a richness to the fine line of his jaw. His eyes were very bright,

and even his wide corduroys did not conceal his powerful grace of movement as he crossed to get the other chair for me.

"You are from the Haarheim Palast, Herr Doktor?" he said.

I told him Yes, but that there was a carnival that had not greatly amused me, and I had taken a walk instead. I also told him that I was neither Doktor nor Professor, but he continued to call me "Herr Doktor" till the end.

"There are many people there?" he asked.

"In the hotel? It is full. They are even sleeping in the bathrooms."

"So. So. I was told so. It all makes work."

"And brings money to Haarheim?" I suggested.

"People lived here before the Palast was built," he answered moodily.

Then, as I looked again round the poor and brilliantly-lighted interior, my eyes were attracted by something that apparently he had made a hasty effort to conceal. Although the table was strewn with fresh chippings, no trinket-box or paper-knife was to be seen; but half hidden behind the newspaper on which the bread and sausage stood was the object on which he had been at work. I saw the head and shoulders of a small wooden statuette.

There was that about the glimpse that made me wish to see more, and in matters of that kind I permit myself a little curiosity. He did not appear to have seen my glance.

"I interrupted you at work?" I said.

"No, Herr Doktor, my time is my own."

"You carve these animals and things?"

"Everybody here carves them. They are made in every house."

"I am a kind of artist too. May I see that?" And I nodded towards the figure.

His bright eyes were mistrustfully on mine. Thinking it might help matters if I gave him my name, which is known here and there, I did so ; but he only shook his head. He had never heard it. Nevertheless the fact that apparently I had a name worth giving seemed to impress him, and his eyes dropped. He muttered something I didn't catch. He took up the penknife, as if he would have resumed his sharpening. And then suddenly he yielded. He rose, pushed the newspaper aside, and placed the statuette in my hands.

I suppose I am about the last man in the world to lose my head over a work of art. It has always seemed to me that the more claims a thing makes the higher must be the standard by which it is judged, and this is to reduce the number of the world's masterpieces considerably. Masterpieces ? Why do I mention the word ? A masterpiece has detachment, and this statuette had none. Its merit was vehemently the other way. It banished the very word " classic." It was as much his own as his own reluctant speech. If his fatalistic handling of the jack had impressed me, all that I could now do was to stare at the piece of wood in my hands. And as I like to be right about my facts, let me first give its dimensions.

It was a woman's figure, about ten inches high, in the attitude of dancing. Allowing a minimum for wastage, the block in which it had slept before it came to life was about 11 by 4 by 5 inches. Call it 12 by 6 by 6 inches, or a quarter of a cubic foot. Those, I say, were the dimensions of the original block. But the figure itself contained nothing like that. Perhaps 6 cubic inches for the trunk and head, 4 for the thighs and legs, and 2 for the arms—total, 12 : out of 432 cubic inches all but 12 had had to be laboriously cut away before the figure emerged, and that at the risk of an oversawing or a fracture at any moment. " What on earth made you choose wood ? " one wanted to cry to him. " Why, you could have set up a wire armature in an hour ! Is there

no clay in Haarheim? Couldn't you have bought a pound or two of wax on one of your timber-journeys to the towns? Why this immense toil? Are you truly of a nature so tormented by itself that if no difficulties exist you must create them?"

For that was precisely what it looked like. He had gone wilfully out of his way to postpone the consummation of his work as long as possible. But now that the thing was finished, or almost so, I had to admit that it was neither wood nor wax, but flesh. The tendon of that supporting ankle would be hard between the fingers, a thumb run up that spine would feel the vertebræ. Feet, ankles, neck were exquisitely finished. But the face, the face only, was left. The cheeks remained rough and pitted by the tool. And in some obscure way this was a relief. For the figure was not merely a statuette of a woman. It was of one *given* woman, in all the idiom of her beauty, and to have given her a face would have been to shout her name as well.

"Where," I asked slowly, "did you learn all this?"

He did not seem to understand—"To carve wood? Everybody here carves wood. Our fathers carved wood, and their fathers."

"Yes, paper-knives and Noah's Ark cows. But *this*? You have then studied?"

He shook his head. At the Schools? No.

"But, man! I know what I am saying. One can get a resemblance, even of anatomy. Nine people out of ten are deceived. But not the tenth. It is *not* Nature, where you can trace the effect back to the cause. It is Art, where, if you do not understand the cause, the effect cannot possibly be right."

For the anatomy of that piece of wood left not a single anatomical question unanswered. The heads of the gastrocnemius *would* swell so, the soleus behave so, the thin, taut flank stretch precisely so.

"I can set bones," he said, as if in apology. "Often

there are accidents in the woods. Then they send for me."

"But are you not often away?"

"Not now. That is finished. Josef Speck broke his leg. I set it and took his team till he was well. Now I am back. I help the second forester."

"I saw you on the road, when the sleigh could not pass."

"I did not see you, Herr Doktor."

"I saw you bend the pole with the jack."

"So?" he said indifferently. "Something had to be done."

"Tell me," I said after a pause, "why you carved the figure in wood, when there were easier ways? Why make it so difficult for yourself?"

He hesitated, at a loss for words. He muttered.

"I don't know. How should I know? I am not as the Herr Doktor. It was as it was. It is still as it is. It has always been so. And it is more difficult than you know. More difficult—more difficult——" his voice sank. And then his manner changed. He had questions to put to me, too, quick little questions, as far as I could see without import.

"It is pleasant at the Palast?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "Hotels are very much alike."

"You are staying there long?"

"Most likely not. No. Not long."

"They are"—the bright eyes were earnestly on mine as he used the German equivalent—"they are run off their feet there? I mean the service?"

"I really don't know. The hotel is full. I don't suppose they employ more people than they have work for."

"No. I believe they work late," he said, frowning, his fingers drumming on the table again.

Light began to dawn on me. His first words on hearing my foot on the snow outside had been, "Is that

you, Karen?" His questions about the hotel, the service, the degree of its busyness, could only mean that he had a wife at the hotel and was expecting her home. I was looking intently at the tool-marked space where the statuette's face should have been.

"Why don't you finish it?" I asked him.

He fixed me with his stare, as if I had committed an impertinence, which quite possibly I had.

"What?" he demanded.

"The hands, the feet, are wonderfully done. You have even put life into the braiding of the hair. Why leave the face like that?"

I have seldom seen a man's expression change so swiftly. A fire seemed to blaze up in him. Something looked for a moment out of his eyes that made me afraid, not, understand, for myself, but for the latent things so imperfectly safeguarded in himself. I have stood on a spot where they say the crust of the earth is only twelve feet thick, and the ground rings hollow to your tread. Sulphurous vapours trickle up from the crevices, and to run a torch along them is to wake the whole region into activity. I felt that I was experimenting with some such torch now. His voice, which had been a pleasant soft guttural, became strained and harsh.

"Why?" he said with sudden loudness. "The Herr Doktor asks me why? Why, indeed! I will tell you. It is because she smiles! Always she smiles! Once she did not smile, not, at least, like that, and I was happy. Now she smiles, and it drives me mad——"

And with an abrupt movement he was on his feet and struggling into the great-coat that lay on the settee.

I protested that it was not necessary that he should accompany me. It would suffice if he indicated the way. But his voice fell to a mutter again.

"No. I will come. There is a branch of the paths—I will come. I will come to the hotel. It is nothing. Often I have been later than this. We will leave the light.

There is a branch of two paths—she knows it too; if the Herr Doktor will please——"

Together we passed out of the hut, leaving the light burning behind us.

Yes, it seemed clear enough—all but one thing. He had been sitting up for this wife who worked at the hotel, and was now going to fetch her, as a husband should. But the other thing remained. Most husbands are happy in the smiles of their wives, but he was not. Once she had not smiled, or not after that fashion, and he said he had been happy. Now she smiled, smiled always, and he left that portion of his carving blank and expressionless. What sort of a smile was that? I wondered deeply as we trudged together along the cart-track at the wood's edge and began to descend by rounded, monotonous hummocks of snow.

But he said not another word. At the junction of the tracks of which he had spoken he paused for a moment, looking along both portions. Then he took the right-hand one, which was obviously the more direct. A quarter of an hour later I fancied I had picked up my bearings again, and told him so, but still he tramped on at my side without replying. A little later still we came upon ski-tracks, and in one quarter the night seemed to have paled perceptibly. We rounded a shoulder of the mountain and gained its crest. Over the pines below was a mist of light, from which faint sounds reached us. They were still keeping up the carnival. We dropped down the track to the Palast Hotel.

A plantation straggles upwards from the rear of the hotel premises, and as we approached this Walther Blum began to tread more carefully. His care increased as the lights of the servants' quarters at the back began to appear through the trees. Most of the lower windows were in darkness, for the kitchens were hardly likely to be troubled again at that hour of the night, but the floors above shone out brightly enough, and through corridor window a

shadow could even be seen to pass from time to time. My own room was in the front of the hotel, where the long balconies are, and one can look down on the *eisbahn*. From this now came a confused babble of sound—music, a faint rattle of applause, the thin hum of skates. A swept path ran round the hotel in that direction. I was about to thank Walther Blum and to take this path when from the darkness there came the sound of a door being softly closed. Two low voices were heard, the one a woman's, the other a man's.

"No, go in now," the woman's voice was saying. "If he says he came to meet me I shall say I went the other way round."

"Dis bonsoir."

"No, not now—be careful—return to the bar——"

"The colleague Otto is there; just ten minutes, in the wood——"

"No, I say——"

We had drawn into the shadow of the trees. For all her protests, there was the sound of a kiss. A door closed, and in the semi-darkness a shadow was seen to steal away. The shadow went, not in the direction by which Blum and I had come, but by the other path. I looked round for Blum.

He was not there. He was a dozen yards away. And he was hurrying, not after the woman, but by the shorter way we had taken, as if he wished to reach home first.

III

Unless one has need of something and rings for it one usually sees little of one's chambermaid, and I had no idea who performed this office for me at the Haarheim Palast. Indeed, it was at my own risk if I concluded that Walther Blum's wife was a chambermaid at all, and not employed in some other branch of the service. My data

for her identification were, on the one hand, uniquely ample, and on the other, scanty to a degree. For all practical purposes they resolved themselves into one distinguishing feature—hair braided in a thick coronal round the head, as if two heavy plaits had been brought forward and woven together.

I have already remarked how, before what later seems a hidden plan is unfolded and revealed, trifling events add themselves to one another with increasing swiftness, until the last trifling accident or two have almost the force of a foregone conclusion. I was not thinking of Walther Blum when I rang my bell some two mornings later. Nor could I possibly know that, just as he had been doing an injured timber-driver's job in an emergency, so she now was temporarily taking over somebody else's duties. She knocked and entered in answer to my ring; and she was so indubitably the woman of the statuette that I could have called her by her name: Karen.

To my astonishment she seemed to be hardly more than seventeen. Young to be married, I thought, and to a husband in whom was something—I do not know if "timeless" is the right word; I mean something that the years can neither add to nor take away from. She was blue-eyed, fair as Ceres, and had a mouth like a sealed rose. If, hastily summoning and dismissing a recollection, I found her on the small side, these things, after all, are more a matter of proportion than of actual size. Her ample blue print skirt filled the doorway like a bell, and her expression was one of petulant gravity, as if, young as she was, she must struggle with things beyond her years, while resenting and hating them. It was right too that she should be a chambermaid. She fitted in better with linen-closets and brush-cupboards than if she had worn a smart apron or sat behind a cash-desk. And I confess that it came over me with a shock that not only could she apparently hold her vows loosely, but was also capable of telling her husband that she

had gone one way home when in fact she had taken another.

I had no excuse for detaining her, and I told her what I wanted; but I missed not a single one of her movements as she stooped to the pile of linen on the floor and began to sort it. Then she looked up.

"The gnädiger Herr has made a list?" she asked in good German.

"No."

"Then I will count it."

So at least she could read and write. I continued to watch her as she made her list. Once she turned her head, and it was the identical turn of the statuette; and the wreath of the honey-fair hair was the same; but her face was hidden. She gathered the linen together, placed it on a towel, and knotted the corners crosswise. She rose with the bundle.

"The gnädiger Herr would wish them quickly?" she said, the grave, resentful eyes on mine.

"As quickly as possible."

"It is done in the hotel. It will be ready at half-past eight o'clock on Thursday evening. I shall do it myself."

The door closed on her and her bundle.

So this was Karen of the smile! Certainly I had seen little smile enough, but possibly she was not yet restored to a smiling humour, for had I been a woman I should not have cared to return to that hut with the icicled window and tell such a husband as Walther Blum a pack of lies in his teeth. I would as soon not have gone home at all. I wondered what her life with him was up there. He had been away on the road. She too, as far as I could gather, was temporarily undertaking other duties. But these were interruptions to the routine. Soon the hotel would close. She would return home, and all day long he would not be far away—merely in some neighbouring portion of the forest, helping the second forester. A couple of strokes with a brush-handle and that raffle of icicles would come

splintering down. The interior would be set to rights. Normal cohabitation would go on as before.

But I checked my thoughts, suddenly still. Everything as before! How then had that been? Since she was certainly not yet eighteen there could not have been a great deal of "before." And why should his statuette, so betrayingly evidential in everything else, keep that blank, mocking, unfeatured face? What was this reason he gave of a smile? A smile is a peaceful, happy thing. So much can it do that, let a man but have it, and a load falls from him, as the mass of late snow, slipping away, suddenly shows the green all new and tender beneath. Yet he had said it himself. She smiled, and the chisel was arrested in his hand. She smiled, and every other perfection that those few cubic inches of wood contained became anonymous. She smiled, and at the mere recollection of it he broke out in fury before a stranger. "Why? I will tell you why! *Because* she smiles! Once she did not smile, and I was happy. Now she smiles—always, always smiles—and it is driving me mad!"

Sufficiently occupied with these thoughts, I turned my attention to the other man.

For I already knew who *he* was. Even the few words I had overheard at the back of the hotel had had that caressing yet acrid Neapolitan *timbre*. He was Nicolo, the white-jacketed waiter in the American bar, and his type is repugnant to me. He could not hide the fulsome meanings in his strongly-staring black eyes, nor keep the vain and conquering smile from his shaven lips. Shaven? He was shaven *au bleu*. He must have shaved twice a day to keep the indigo so smoothly down. I learned that he did in fact shave for the second time before coming on to serve the evening cocktails, for, seeking a way up to the roof early one evening to see what the view was like up there, I came by chance upon the little room where daily the barber attended, and there was Nicolo, with the napkin tucked about the cauliflower of soap, his head back,

and that ineffable smile on his face at something imaginary between him and the ceiling. His teeth, too, were as white as his barman's jacket, and as he polished his glasses behind the counter he might have been under glass himself, so sleek and unspotted a picture did he make.

In the circumstances I saw no reason why, over my modest *apéritif*, I should not find out as much about Nicolo as I could.

I soon had him marked down as a diligent fellow, with ambitions. A German-Swiss hotel is no bad stepping-stone from Naples to London, and Nicolo was making the most of his time. He was continually checking his stock, marking bottles, and copying the remaining quantities into a little book; and he had another book, too, with coloured edges, in French, German, Italian and English. It was a book of cookery-recipes, and his short straight nose was never out of it. One of these days he was going to have his own hotel. Every *pfennig* of change that was pushed back to him as *trinkgeld* was set aside, and presently he would be leaving Haarheim, not to return. He would take his cookery-book with him in his trunk, and his hard-boiled shirts, and his black bows and starched white jackets. But he would not take his mistress, if she was that. Why pay excess on superfluous luggage? There were mistresses enough in London for a handsome, far-seeing, ambitious fellow such as our Nicolo.

So there was dapper Nicolo, with his English lessons in his spare hours, and his serenely-insolent way of looking at women, and his smooth, plump hands that would let them go like so many water-drops when he reached for a towel. And there was Walther Blum, muttering, morose, half savage as regarded one part of his nature, the other half mingled flame and passion and nameless desire. And apparently Nicolo got the kisses and Walther got the smiles. It doesn't matter by what processes I pieced all this together. I hardly think I did piece it together. It fell together of itself. It was simply the final assembly

of elements that had long been preparing, and I doubt if anything could have changed the complete pattern into which they finally fell. On my walks, at my solitary table in the corner, leaning over the balcony at night and watching the waltzings and acrobatics on the *eisbahn*, I pondered much about it all, and one of the resolutions to which I came was that when Karen brought my linen back at half-past eight o'clock on the Thursday evening I would be there to have, if possible, a word with her.

IV

For I am no stranger to hotels, and I know what their promises about laundry usually amount to. It comes when it comes. But here was a promise much more precisely made. It was made even to the half-hour. She was doing it herself, and it was to be in my room at half-past eight. Of course it might not come, but I was inclined to dismiss that. There were too many things against it. Say, for one thing, she was in love with this fellow. At half-past eight the hotel, including myself, would be dining. The bedrooms would long since have been made ready for the night, except for the final touches that would only take a few minutes. And at half-past eight Otto, as I knew, relieved Nicolo at the American bar. It was the one interval of the day that they might reasonably expect to have to themselves. That, briefly, was my guess at the position.

Yet I was dissatisfied with my guess. It seemed to condemn her too summarily. There must be some reason for the hate and resentfulness that dwelt so contradictorily side by side with the gravity in her clear eyes, and I began to play with hypotheses. Suppose (I argued to myself) that she had been married a year. If she had had even a little happiness during that year, it was as much as could

have been expected from a man so palpably at odds with the world and human life as he found it as Walther Blum. The chances were that he avoided his kind, or classed them, too, as phenomena with the trees and the rocks and the snows. He must have been a very difficult man to live with.

Yet it was a woman he had married, not a rock or a tree; and there had been something very steadfast in the eyes she had turned up to me as she had packed my linen on the floor. Apparently this man, who took life hardly himself, had passed a hard portion on to her, too, and she had flown to one who took it more easily, cajoled her, flattered her, and would turn her off the moment he got what he wanted. In that case I was sorry for her, but except to tell her to make the best of her Walther and leave the other alone, I should not have known how to advise her.

I had intended to be in my room when Karen came at half-past eight on Thursday; as it turned out I had no choice in the matter. A slight indisposition necessitated my seeing the doctor that afternoon; I was told that a couple of days in bed would set me right; and to bed I was sent. I had been in bed some hours when I heard Karen's tap at the door.

One minor difficulty at least was out of the way. I could not very well have detained her had she wished to finish the errand and be gone, but she, if she chose, might, in the circumstances, linger as long as she wished. She came in with my parcel. She wore the same little jacket and wide blue print skirt as before. In anybody else I should have called her salutation a curtsey, but in her it was somehow both given and withheld. Then, in the act of setting down the parcel, she paused.

"The gnädiger Herr is not well?" she asked, as if she had only just noticed that I was in bed.

I told her that it was nothing, and that I should be all right in a couple of days.

" Is it the gnädiger Herr's pleasure that I should count the linen and put it away? "

" If you would be so kind, Karen."

She unfastened the parcel, checked its contents, and began to open drawers. She did not ask where anything was to be put, but went about her light task smoothly and efficiently. Only towards the end of her shirt-and-collar sorting did she delay a little. Then she turned, with the last of the washing still in her hand.

" The gnädiger Herr then knows my name? "

" Yes. You are Karen, the wife of Walther Blum. I have spoken with your husband."

" You know him? " The limpid blue eyes were on mine, and she seemed to have forgotten the third-personal address.

" Very slightly," I answered, though I felt this to be, in some odd way, untrue. " Among others, I am not at all sure that he didn't save my life."

Most people would have asked how that had come about, but she only knitted the brows above the blue eyes. She put away the last of the linen and closed the drawer. I thought she was about to leave. But she stood there with her hands on her hips (she seemed incapable of an attitude that was not alive with grace, and her hands and wrists in particular were full of the most moving beauty), the small foot under the bell-shape of blue print tapping, her teeth catching at that half-rose of a lower lip. No wonder Blum had given forth her shape so passionately in his wood. I could hardly take my eyes from her. And then her own eyes, which had been on the polished floor, met mine again.

" I am also grateful to your husband for directing me when I had missed my way," I went on.

And that she did take up. " When? " she demanded, almost imperiously.

" Let me see. Four nights ago."

She betrayed herself completely in her next question,

for I might have met him anywhere; but she didn't seem to care. "And you went in?" she challenged me.

"Yes," I answered. There was no need to say where. She herself went straight to the point.

"And he walked back to the hotel with you?"

"Yes. . . . Though I didn't say so."

Still she didn't seem to care, though she bit her lip again. I would have given a fortune to have known all that was passing behind those rounds of palest blue under the wreath of fairest hair, but a very little I thought I did know. I had been in her husband's house four nights before. He had walked back to the hotel with me, and she herself had slipped away like a shadow by another path. There must have been—let us call it a situation—when she had climbed the mountain and pushed at the door of that solitary hut again. And above all, if I had been inside I had seen the statuette.

"The gnädiger Herr speaks the truth," she said; "since I knew all that," she added, with a lift of her head.

Then suddenly it came out, as if somebody else spoke for me. Up to that moment it had not entered my head to ask such a question.

"Why do you smile, Karen? I want to know why you smile."

Ah! (the eyes seemed to say). So I knew that too! Well, if I already knew it it saved the time and trouble of explanation. All could be understood without further ado. Nevertheless she repeated my question.

"Why do I smile?"

"Why do you smile?"

"You have been in the house?"

"I said so."

"And you saw—it?"

I spoke slowly—"By 'it' you mean the thing that doesn't smile?"

" I knew you had seen it. It never will smile. It will never be finished. But I—I shall smile the more. . . . So he told you that, too ? "

He told me that you smiled, and that it drove him mad."

" It is no worse to be mad than to be killed, as I have been killed," she answered with compressed lips. " One can be killed, and yet go on living."

Killed ! She, in the bloom and freshness of her seventeen short years ! . . . But girls have these fancies. In another year or two she would be laughing at them herself. I leaned up on my pillow and looked at her attentively.

" What do you mean, Karen ? "

She returned my look disdainfully, as if I and all like me were things of so little importance that the truth could be flung to us as one tosses a bone to a dog. But her hands had left her hips, and were clenched at her sides.

" Why should I not tell you ? Why should I not tell everybody ? It is only *he* who doesn't understand ! " broke from her. " Listen ! Do you know how old I am ? I am seventeen-and-a-half years old. And I have been married to Walther Blum one year—one whole year ! I didn't want to marry him. He made me marry him. We didn't even belong to the same valley. He lived in one valley and I in another, with the Huldhorn between. Among us we marry in the same valley—because of the mountain, because of the Huldhorn. Hardly a man can pass the cornice in the winter. Even in the summer it is a toil. So our young men marry the girls at home. But he came over, down into our village from the skies. He came over whatever the weather was, with runners on his feet that he had made himself. He could have settled among us, for he lived all alone, but he would not. He told me that he would not come every night, but I soon learned what *that* meant. It meant that he might not arrive every night. But he set out every night. I asked him once, when he was very late, whether he had got lost,

but he said he had a compass in his breast. I used to open the shutters and look up at the crest of the hill for his lantern."

So he had made even his love difficult to the verge of impossibility! Her words pictured it all the more vividly because of their very abruptness—him in his hut making ready his lantern; his setting-out; the diamonded night sky overhead or else the blinding scurries of snow; the soft sliding thunder of a distant avalanche, the creep round the cornice of the Huldhorn; the pause to look down on the handful of houses that made the hamlet—and all guided by that in his breast that he called a compass. I saw the child of sixteen peering past the shutter for the winking light of his lantern. And I was quite prepared to hear that she had been afraid of him even then.

"My parents were against it, gnädiger Herr," she went on more quietly. "They said it was not natural that he should not be able to get a girl without coming over the mountain. But he said, Get a girl! He had seen them—girls! They were nothing. If *those* were girls, then *I* was something else, and he wanted me, whatever I was, if those others were girls! He said that my smile made him warm even on the cornice of the Huldhorn. My father said that was high-falutin' talk, and not good. Let him come and make his home among us and then it would be time to talk, my father said. And the Herr Pastor, who was also my schoolmaster, said the same. But I began not to listen to them. At first, all the same, I didn't want to marry Walther. I told him not to come. But he made me marry him, gnädiger Herr. He gave me no peace. There is no peace where he is. If there is a moment's peace an avalanche follows. And when I learned that he set out every night, then the nights when he didn't arrive were terrible. I felt that I had killed him by not marrying him sooner. I was very young, gnädiger Herr. I am older now. And so I married him."

That, too, I could believe—that he had made her

marry him. He had compelled her a little at a time, as he had loaded up that sixty-foot tree, forcing it to bend. And suddenly she stamped her small foot so that the blue print bell shook with the passionate gesture.

"And what was it? Lieber Gott! Do the other men do so to the other girls? Why, then, do they not die? But I have seen them laughing, these young married girls; how can they do it? I tell you, you who lie there, that it was endless! Always it was so, always, always. . . . And there, with the Huldhorn between, where was there to run to? And what was the good of crying. No, I do not wish! He broke me, he broke me. It arrived that he might do as he wished; what did I care? Then he reproached me, but it no longer mattered to me. Nothing mattered. And so I was contented, thinking I knew the worst.

"But I did *not* know the worst, you who lie there!", she cried in a voice that mounted. "Having broken my body he began to break my mind too! I had had lessons from the Herr Pastor. I could read and write; I could speak a little French; and he could neither read nor write nor speak French. And because I could not answer his questions he called me a fool! His questions, lieber Gott! He did not understand them himself. They were not questions! I have heard him say that he did not know what it was he wanted to know! How, then, should *I* know? He called us all fools. Even the Herr Pastor he called a fool. He said that we knew no more than he, and that if he learned to read and write he would be the greatest fool of all. And when one is called a fool sufficiently one ceases to open one's mouth. Days passed when I never spoke to him. Even at night I never spoke to him. All was without words or speech, since he wished it so. Why should one speak when one is a fool?"

Poor, hapless pair! What was there to say? I said what I could.

"Much is laid on him, Karen."

"What is laid on him? How, laid on him?" she flashed.

"It hasn't got a name. He is right in saying that the Herr Pastor knows no more of the reason of everything than he. Nevertheless, it is fastened on him as they fasten the trees to the carts—with a chain and a winch."

"It is on *me* that it is fastened!" she cried. "Listen to me! Listen heedfully! What had I left? My beauty remained. I do not mean my beauty as at first, though he might please himself about that. My beauty to his eyes remained. That was all—all! And his eyes never left me. They followed me about like the piercings in a dark shutter. And then the other—all else—stopped. I existed in his eyes only. I was his *Gliederpuppe*, his thing that he copied from. Even in mid-winter I must go about—yes, even when I was sweeping up his chippings or cooking the supper . . . but the gnädiger Herr has seen. Soon I ceased to blush. That was not his first statuette. Many he cast into the stove, saying it was all they were fit for—more true to say it was all *I* was fit for! I was a fool. That other was finished. But this remained. I had married a man who growled over pieces of wood. I was something to turn into a piece of wood. If I could tell you, you who lie there listening—if I could tell you——"

I put up my hand to calm her. It was not necessary to tell me; the statuette had done that. I thought of that lonely hut far up the Huldhorn. Terrible houses of men, of which we see the outside only! A mansion in a London square, a crowded Paris tenement, a cabin on a vineyard's slope, a log-hut high and lonely in a world of snows—just once in a while a chink opens, a curtain is left a little aside. One learns the reasons why a will was made, why a divorce-action was entered, why a crime was committed. Then the chink closes again and the curtain slips back into its place. But one has seen. I saw in Walther Blum a man scourged by life and his station

in it, dwelling in solitude of soul up there, saturating his eyes with anguishing and untranslatable beauty, and with curses casting his wretched images into the stove. I saw a young girl, shy with the shyness of young girls, modest with a peasant's flinching modesty, shrivelling Semele-like under the fierce heat of a passion elemental and beyond her comprehension, forced to yield up her very superficies as her sole remaining value. Comprehend it? Because she did not comprehend it, it was the last violation. The little he had left her of her own, to do as she pleased with, he used up in order that the eyes of strangers might know as much of her as he. I had seen. Anybody might see. And she no longer cared.

"But all this, Karen—it might explain why you weep. It does not explain why you smile," I said after a long silence.

"Does it not?" she taunted me. "To you, no, perhaps; but *he* knows! Listen! It is not all. I now give way to him in everything. From here to here"—she put out one foot and, with a gesture terrible in its very slightness, lightly touched her chin—"*that* is his. He may look at it, embrace it, burn it, cut it with knives. I now run to let him do as he wishes with it. 'Yes, Walther, assuredly, Walther,' I say—for we speak now. But he pays. There is still something in me he cannot touch." And the smile, with all its hideous meanings for him, stole over the young rose of a mouth. "Is it not so, gnädiger Herr? And when he groans and weeps and prays for that something—for the gnädiger Herr is right when he says it has no name, but it is *that* he wants—is not that alone enough to make the smile come? For I cannot give that something now if I would. It is me, but it is not mine. He has all the rest instead. And so it is even wifely to smile."

"If it drives him mad, Karen?" I asked gravely. For I had remembered Nicolo's absence from the American bar. "If it drives him—or you—to something desperate?"

She now spoke quite lightly, with a little stretch of herself. " At least it would be an end. . . . Please would the gnädiger Herr like me to send the valet as I go down ?"

" No, Karen."

" Or any service——? "

" There is nothing, thank you. But I should like to see you again."

With the smile still about her mouth, the steady scornful look in her clear eyes, and her hands upon her hips again, she said a mocking and a bitter thing : " The gnädiger Herr has only to ring."

" Karen ! . . . Why do you not go to your home over the Huldhorn for a short time ? "

" I come here instead," she answered ; and the next moment she was gone, leaving me gazing at the " Flight into Egypt " carved in high relief in brown wood on the wall opposite my bed.

V

How much better for Walther Blum (I thought) could he have contented himself with work of that kind, carving what every peasant in the district carved, the edelweiss paper-knives, the clock-faces, and the other objects of the stationers' shops ! But what was the good of thoughts like that ? He was what he was, and who shall justify the ways of man to woman, of woman to man ? It was much more to the point that apparently his wife was carrying on this intrigue with the Neapolitan. Or was it not an intrigue at all ? Was it, so to speak, part of the smile ? Was it designed to show him that all that he had destroyed in her might still revive at the beck of somebody else ?

Our conversation, which I have abbreviated, had taken some time. If she had had an assignation with Nicolo at half-past eight she had certainly not kept it.

She might or might not be with him now. It was truly no affair of mine. And yet I felt restless and anxious.

My indisposition was a short one. After two days I was up and about again. I received the congratulations of such of the guests as had any interest in me, and was told that I had missed little during my lying-up. The weather had broken. A strong thaw had set in. The *eisbahn* was a deserted waste, and there were trunks at the door of the hotel—for those who were not departing immediately were preparing to do so, and within a few days the clientèle would probably be diminished by half. The signs of the winter's end were not confined to the guests. There was a stir in the natural life of the district, too. Down the lower slopes one saw more cattle, and multitudinous sounds of deliquescence and break-up were everywhere. Upstairs in the hotel they were already closing unneeded rooms. And downstairs Nicolo, checking his stock and poring over his book in four languages, had the American bar to himself.

The incident to which I am coming happened at five o'clock one afternoon upstairs in the already half-empty hotel. They were stripping beds and rolling up the bolsters and mattresses, and as a portion of the staff had already been discharged the rest of the remaining personnel was bearing a hand. Among them was Nicolo, in his shirt-sleeves, a plump cock among the print-skirted hens, smiling, showing his white teeth, and within an hour of his second daily shave. His jests, as he dragged out the mattresses and carried the stacks of sheets, caused an incessant tittering among the maids, and I suppose it is because I have no such success with women as he that I liked him less than ever.

Something had taken me to my room, which was, of course, untouched, and I had seen all this in passing. I did whatever it was that had brought me up, and came out again. A few yards along the corridor stood an addition to the group. Walther Blum had joined it.

He was standing by the half-open door of a linen-room, watching his wife and Nicolo as they folded a blanket between them. For two reasons I did not pass on : I was interested in the situation, and I had a fancy to pass the time of day with Blum. Thus, as I lingered, I heard what passed between Nicolo and Karen Blum, in French.

" When one folds blankets you know what happens ? " the Neapolitan was saying.

Karen shook the plaited head.

" It cannot happen this time, for a reason. The reason stands there watching us. But one folds, so—and so——" the blanket was halved and quartered as the two holders of it approached—" and the one who takes the blanket takes something else also."

" What ? "

" Ah, so little when one thinks of the rest ! (Comme il fait les yeux féroces !) "

" Il fait toujours les yeux féroces."

" Mais les tiens——" his own black bull's-eyes rolled to her clear rounds, and the look itself was the kiss of which he spoke. She made way for me to pass, and I sought Blum.

The man from Naples was certainly taking risks. I myself should hesitate before I provoked on a man's face the sort of look that was on Blum's. When I greeted him he did not at first speak. When he did speak it was not in answer to my greeting.

" The Herr Doktor speaks languages. What was that he was saying ? " he said under his breath.

" I heard nothing. What brings you here, Blum ? "

" Those things that the Herr Doktor does not hear bring me here," he replied grimly. " There is no longer any reason why she should remain. Half of them have left already. It is time she left."

" It is only a matter of a few days."

" I have come to fetch her to-day," he answered curtly.

At that moment there was a further interesting passage

between the pair who folded the blankets. She had loaded him with a pile of them for carrying away, and the pile bulged and tottered. He looked back over his shoulder.

"Give a hand or they will be down and all to fold again," he panted, for he was of a sedentary habit, and the blankets had lodged stiffly against some small projection of the wall. She tripped after him.

But she did not reach him. Blum's voice was raised.

"Karen!"

She turned. One would have thought she had not known of his presence.

"Yes, Walther?"

"You are to come home. You are to come now. Go and make yourself ready."

It was peremptory, perhaps a little unreasonable; but she ignored that. The look she turned on him was not mere yielding; it was the deliberate strangling of a will of any kind to set against his. Already she was close on him, hastening to whatever room she occupied. At me she did not glance. The look was all for him—as also was the smile that accompanied it.

"Yes, Walther."

"Go and pack your box. I will carry it up the mountain."

"Yes, Walther."

"At once. Get your wages and wait for me."

"Yes, Walther." The next moment she was gone.

I thought for a moment that Walther Blum was going to seek out Nicolo there and then, for he stood irresolute, watching him with wrathful, smouldering eyes. But all at once he turned away. I thought he was going to take some domestics' staircase or other, but he didn't. In his black jacket and spacious corduroys, though carrying his broad hat in his hand, he marched down the main staircase as if he had been staying in the hotel. I followed him,

and on the broad outer verandah called his name. He turned.

"Herr Doktor?"

"Could I have a word with you?"

He bowed, for he had the peasant's courtesy.

"Properly speaking, what I want to say is none of my business, unless I can be of use. But you yourself spoke of it one night, and since then an accident has brought about a talk with your wife also."

"She shall come away to-day," he muttered.

"But you speak as if she had left your roof. She has returned late perhaps, but she has worked late. There has been much to do. You will remember that you asked me the question."

He made no reply, and again I wondered what had passed between them on the night when he had overheard her words to Nicolo and been a witness of their kiss. The next moment he had told me.

"I have warned her!" he cried. "That man, anybody can see what he is! Would I had the shaving of him; I would make the blade keen for *that*! . . . What was he saying in that language?" he demanded once more.

"I scarcely heard. It was harmless."

"It was *not* harmless! Those eyes do not go with harmless things!"

I was much of the same opinion, but, "He is going away in a week," I said. "Do not think of him."

But the empty verandah boomed with Walther Blum's outbreak.

"In a week! And what does *that* mean? He has not possessed her. I made her tell me that night, and it would have given her pleasure to say Yes, but she does not lie. He has not possessed her. But there is still time! All these months he has planned it, and he has one week left! I do not wish to kill. It is better to take her away. But if, within a week, I find him one yard above that plantation's edge——" He stopped.

This was a dangerous turn for things to take. Not only was he capable of doing it; he was capable of finding, out of that chaotic tormented mind of his, overwhelming reason why it should be done. If the lore of the Herr Pastor over the mountain was ignorance and confusion to him, he would make as little of a Commandment. Neither was it safe that he should boom out menaces of this kind under the verandah of the Haarheim Palast Hotel.

"Your wife will not come out this way," I said. "Will you take a little walk?" And to make sure of his doing so I took his arm. We turned by the path that led round the hotel, under the plantation beyond which if Nicolo went a single yard it would be at his own risk. A little way up the plantation was an old wooden cattle-trough, with the bent and rusty remains of the pipe that had fed it. It was half full of snow, but we should see from there when Karen came out, and its thick worn edge made a seat. We sat down side by side.

We might have been waiting for Karen and nothing else, for we were as silent as if our minds had been unoccupied. It would have been like him not to speak at all. It was therefore I who took the word.

"Walther," I said, using the name for the first time, "to what kind of a life do you take Karen when she goes up there?"

"To mine," he said. "To the only one I have. But she gets the whole of it. *I* want no light-o'-love!" he added contemptuously.

"But is it necessary to give her the whole of it? May not the whole be too much? She is very young."

His eyes were past the hotel, over the valley furrowed with white, thinned and mottled into dark unsightly patches. Soon the gentian and anemone would smile there and the sweet cold freshets thread themselves downward under the grass, and the tonk of the bells be borne on the wind. And he seemed to be thinking of gentler things

than murder, too, for he began to speak in a voice from which the anger had died away.

" It may be so, Herr Doktor," he said. " It should not be so, for what is to love if it is not to give? But sometimes I ask myself whether only I am right, and I cannot answer. It is *here* "—he placed a clenched hand on his breast—" and if I feel it there, how can I lie to myself and say I do not feel it? We cannot all be right, I and they. Then come times when I tell myself that it is easy for *them* to say ' I give all,' when *their* all perhaps is so little. And yet again there are times when I rage, and say they are wrong, were they as countless as the pines, and only *I* understand. Is that too much, Herr Doktor? "

" Much too much."

" When I love her? "

" Love her a little less, Walther."

The brown hand gripped the remains of the rusty trough-pipe, and I could see its fierce tension. Then his head sank suddenly to his breast. He spoke in a shaky voice.

" Herr Doktor, I have no words of my own. The words I have are carved and filed smooth by others. They are a great number, the others, and I am only one, and ignorant at that. Therefore I do not say I loved her, Herr Doktor. She happened to me. I say she happened to me. She happened to me as rain happens, or sun, or the fall of the tree, or the avalanche. She happened as sickness happens, or healing, or thirst, or hunger. Sometimes, when she looked beautiful, I could even love myself a little, that I should be the cause of her looking beautiful. She lived in the valley over the Huldhorn. What was the Huldhorn? I have crossed it in all weathers. They do not love, these young men who will not take the trouble if the one they love lives a couple of pastures away! Herr Doktor, if I have no words to speak of these things, was it not word enough to cross the Huldhorn for her?

I could have carried her, too, as I shall carry her box to-day. So she happened to me, in that valley.

"And I said to myself, 'Have a care, Walther Blum! You are rude and unlettered. *They* have been to school with the Herr Pastor! Therefore contradict nobody. If they seem to you to talk foolish and vain things, things that will not bear examination, say nothing. Look at Karen instead. Look at her as she takes down the platters, as she serves the cheese, as she kisses her father before going to bed. Look at her as if she was the mountain air you breathed, the mountain pool in which you swam.' All the way back over the Huldhorn it remained with me. Beauty is agony to me, Herr Doktor. She cannot move a hand but I feel that no woman's hand has ever moved so before. And even these are words, that other people use. Let them pass. They are nothing . . . ah!"

What else he would have said I cannot tell, for at that moment there was a little bustle at the back of the hotel. Nicolo appeared, bearing in front of him a small trunk of metal, corded. Karen followed, in a queer stiff little round hat. Nicolo set the trunk on the ground, with a gesture that seemed to say, Ach, but that was heavy! Blum had risen. I continued to sit where I was. He dropped down through the plantation and joined the pair at the door. As far as I could see he did not look at Nicolo. He threw the box up to his shoulder and made a gesture of his head to his wife. A few minutes later they had passed me, she a few paces in front, he with the corded box on his shoulder, on their way to their home among the melting snows.

VI

It chanced that I had an acquaintance at the hotel who was among the last to leave, and I might well have left with him; but for reasons I need not go into it was

not to be so, and I went to see him off instead. The station is twelve miles away, and whereas we had come in sleighs, we went back in Swiss carts. I said good-bye to my friend, and the heads of the horses were turned homeward again. Half-way back I saw Walther Blum. He was sitting on a timber-cart. The vehicles passed without incident. I think he saw me, but was not sure. He gave no sign of recognition.

"Has Josef Speck fallen ill again?" I asked of the driver. Josef Speck was the man whose leg Blum had set, driving his cart for him until his recovery.

"No, gnädiger Herr. Josef Speck is well and on his journey."

"Then what does Walther Blum going to the town?"

The man laughed. "Oh, Walther Blum is unaccountable, gnädiger Herr. Nobody asks himself why Walther Blum does anything."

We drove on.

As I look back on this incident I find it difficult to justify the apprehension I felt. Walther Blum was on a timber-cart, going to the town; why should he not be on a timber-cart, going to the town? He was not even driving, but sitting by the driver's side; why, if he had business that way, should he not take the chance of a lift? For all I knew he was going to dispose of his paper-knives and blotters and fretwork clock-faces. If he was away for a couple of days it would be lonely for his wife, but they do not mind loneliness up there, and possibly he had sent her to her people. It was as natural that Walther Blum should be taking a journey on a cart as that I myself should be saying good-bye to my friend.

None the less, I could not get rid of it like that. "Nobody asks why Walther Blum does anything," my driver had just said; but I asked. Say he was not going away at all. Say he merely wished it to be supposed he had gone away. Say, in short, that he was setting a trap

for Nicolo. Had it been possible, I would have bidden my driver turn and follow Walther Blum wherever he went. That was not possible. But something else was. I couldn't follow Walther Blum, but I could keep an eye on Nicolo. He would not know he was being watched, and watched, moreover, for his own health and safety.

It was the first thing I did on my return to the hotel to walk into the American bar. He happened to be there. Disliking him as I did, I nevertheless made myself talk to him.

"So another has left, Nicolo," I said, with an assumption of cheerfulness. "It is drawing near the end."

"Monsieur will be the last," he said, busily polishing.

"When do you go to London?"

"In four days, Monsieur."

"Well, this country is beautiful in the winter, and beautiful in the summer, but it is not much in between."

He showed his close white teeth in a smile. "It is Monsieur who sees the country," he said. "We of the staff work too long hours to see much of it."

"But you go up the mountain sometimes for a walk and to breathe the air?"

"Not I, Monsieur. I do not like the cold. I like Capri and Sorrento and the sun on Naples Bay."

And, having ascertained that he was in the hotel, I left him, but did not go too far away.

I well believed that he was not fond of mountain climbing. He might even have to run the gauntlet of jests if he, the smooth lazy one, were seen toiling up past the plantation during the day. For many reasons he would prefer the night. And I had no evidence that he intended to go at all. But I was persuaded by something more subtly strong than evidence. There were vast gaps in my information. I only knew in outline what had passed between Blum and his wife on that first night of all. That she and Nicolo exchanged kisses I did know, but

not every kiss is an adultery, and it would be an unfeeling heart that found no forgiveness for her. But while I did not know the details, I did know the sum and result of them. Blum himself was satisfied that no guilty act had been committed. At the same time he was equally satisfied that the attempt would be made, and had cunningly and deliberately provided the opportunity. If Nicolo did not climb the mountain it was even possible that he might prevail on her to make a pretext to come to the hotel. Or nothing at all might happen.

But as the day wore on and I wandered aimlessly about the precincts of the hotel, I thought so less and less.

I come now to the moment when Nicolo did leave the hotel, setting his face up the mountain. With the passing of time I can survey the events of that evening almost calmly; but time has had to pass. I have ceased to call myself a young man. I apprehend, too constantly, the meaning of such words as causation and fatality and absence of design. I have learned how events themselves take charge and fall into inhuman and unpremeditated patterns. I think it was so with Walther and Karen Blum. As she had "happened" to him, so the world had happened to him and he to the world, and there was no escape from the dreadful logic of the upshot. It had to be so, and it was so, and I had to be a witness of it.

Nicolo did not steal out of the hotel like a man on a guilty errand. He strolled out, apparently with no other purpose than to take the air. He wore his waiter's black trousers, but had changed his white jacket for one of purplish cloth, and on his head was a green velours hat with feathers in it. To English eyes his appearance was incongruous yet somehow dandified, and he himself was evidently well content with it. All this I saw from where I stood at the verandah's end. He sauntered round to the back of the hotel, and I ascended quickly to my room. Not that there was any hurry. I had to let him get ahead.

I do not carry firearms, but if I had had a pistol I should certainly have slipped it into my pocket. For moral effect, naturally.

He was not quite out of sight when I descended; he was well up the plantation, giving a backward glance, as if he wondered how much longer it was necessary to keep up appearances. I stepped out of his line of vision. There was one chance and one only that I should lose him, and even that did not matter—for if he took the longer and less steep of the two paths that met again farther on, I could take the other one and be there before him. That might be the best. At least I should escape the hateful appearance of watching another man unobserved. As he was of a corpulent build he probably would take the easier path. In fact he did so, and I the other.

I made haste. If Blum should appear he would hardly resent it that one such as I should be found alone with his wife, and if he did not appear Nicolo would be likely to find an empty house at the end of his journey. It may seem odd, but it seemed somehow part of what I have called the pattern that I made no attempt to divert Nicolo himself. He was a contemptible fellow, and must take his chance. He was away to the right, somewhere over the shoulder of the hill, and as I passed the point that he, too, would presently have to pass, I quickened my pace to something like a run, that he might not see me ahead.

More snow than in the valleys still lay on the ground, and as I reached the beginning of the dark clearing the ghostly mass of the Huldhorn rose miles ahead, just discernible. Not a quarter of a mile away Blum's light showed, almost as watery as on my first visit—for I discovered that the icicles had not been broken away, but still formed a screen, though a perforated and attenuated one only. This time I did not look in. I walked up to the door and knocked. Only when I had done so

did it occur to me that my knock might be taken for the knock of somebody else.

There was no reply, and I knocked more loudly. Still I had no answer, though I heard a muffled sound within. There was nothing for it but the window. I advanced and looked through a ribbed and ragged hole.

Karen sat there, alone. She sat where her husband had sat, under the powerful incandescent, and her round eyes appeared to be staring straight into mine. But I don't think they saw. She was rigid, as if the sound of my knock had frozen both the sight and speech of her. The table at which she sat was empty. On the little shelf stood the row of wooden cattle and carved knives, but I did not see the statuette. I called ; I gave my name ; and as if my name had been a magic word, she broke into life. She sprang up and disappeared for an instant from my view. I heard the shooting of a bolt. By this time I was at the door. She flung it open, dragged me in, and shot the bolt again almost in one movement. Then she clasped both her hands on one of my shoulders, and I had to save her from falling.

" Oh, the dear God has sent you ! " she moaned on my breast. " Do not go. Keep me so. Keep me so till morning, for God knows what is going to happen this night ! "

" I know what is going to happen this night if you will, Karen. You cannot stay here alone. Put your things on and come with me back to the hotel."

She shook convulsively. " I cannot ! I dare not ! I was told I must stay here ! Stay here with me ! "

" Certainly I will stay with you ; but who told you you must stay here ? "

" He told me—Walther——"

" But he has gone to the town ? "

" He has not gone to the town. I do not know where he is. But he is not far away. He was here an hour

ago. He has kept me here all day, that I might neither go nor send word to the hotel."

"Why should you wish to send word to the hotel, Karen? Word to whom, and about what?"

But she only said, "Oh! Oh! Oh!" and crushed herself harder against me.

"When I knocked, Karen, did you think it might be somebody else, that you did not answer?" I asked.

I felt her nod.

"Walther?" (The door had been bolted, and the visitor might have been he.)

"No."

"The somebody else—has he ever been here?"

"Never—never—never!" she said, with a passion that utterly convinced me.

"You know what I mean?" I whispered.

"Yes."

"Then shall I go and turn him back?"

She bounded from my arms in fright. "What! Then he *is* coming?"

"There may be time to warn him."

She sank to the floor. "If he is on the mountain—Walther can run like a hare and leap like the chamois——"

And I remembered Blum's words: "If he steps a yard beyond the plantation——"

It had been plain enough before; it was bright as a sunburst now. My first unworthy idea, that Blum had turned his house into a mousetrap and baited it with a piece of cheese, was utterly wrong. Nobody was luring Nicolo. He was free to stay away. But he was free *only* as long as he stayed away. Once he set foot on those mountain wastes he entered a cage of which the door closed behind him. What chance had he, the keeper of an American bar, against a man who could run like a hare and leap like a chamois? . . . And yet a panic took me, too. I must have caught it from her, sunk to a huddle on the floor. I could not see a human being walk into an

open trap like that. I must warn him. I sprang to the bolt of the door.

But I was too late. I heard the faint sound of a distant scream. I flung open the door with such force that the wall shook.

"*Eee-eee-eee!*" It was the tight-drawn, inarticulate scream of pure terror, and it came from somewhere in the wood. He had sought safety in the wood—and from a pursuing woodsman!

"*Eee-eee-eee!*" Again came the squeal. My shadow streamed from the doorway, and the beginning of the wood beyond was illuminated as if by the headlights of a car. Karen had stopped her ears.

"*Eee-eee-eee!*"

And then, a little way within the wood, I saw him, if that shadow was he. The sounds of the last scream had died away, as if he had merely continued to scream as a child screams, having once begun. He seemed to be listening. Blum I did not see. This made matters no better. Better to see Blum than to know all the time that he was near, stealing noiselessly from tree to tree, ushering, shepherding, getting his man where he wanted him.

"*Eeee-eeee-eeee! . . . Eeee-eeee-eeee!*"

Such an added extreme of terror would have seemed inexpressible, but he did it. The next moment he was flying straight for the hut, as a moth makes for a lamp. His arms were above his head, and Blum was after him.

Do not tell me how feeble was my effort to bang the door between the two. I cannot leap like a chamois nor cover the mountains like a hare. Loudly the door swung to and back again. As it did so something fell to the floor with a little snap. I do not know on what ledge or shelf it had been standing, but it was Blum's statuette, and the violent jar of the door had brought it down. Breathing easily, Blum slowly bolted the door.

" Walther ! " I cried sharply, " open that door ! No harm is done ! Let the fellow go ! "

He did not appear to hear me. His bright eyes were on the other's white and sweating face.

" Then I will open it——" and I took a step forward.

But I seemed merely to precipitate the thing I wished to forestall. Even in a light-built man I should not have thought so swift a movement possible. I fell back with a ringing head and one useless elbow, and Blum was not calm now. He was trembling and his face was advanced towards the Neapolitan's.

" So you thought you would come ? The coast was clear ? Just one little peep past the plantation before you left ? "

Nicolo was licking his lips. His purple jacket was fouled and burred, and his green velours hat had gone.

" You said to yourself, ' Walther Blum is away, and his wife must be lonely, and it would be neighbourly to sit with her an hour ' ? "

I saw Nicolo's fleeting look at the window. I read his thoughts : a sudden leap to the table and a header, through icicles and all—Blum could have done it—it was all there was to do. It was as a matter of fact Nicolo who struck first, a desperate and futile blow. He did not even succeed in getting on to the table. He was caught and tripped, and in a moment both men were on the floor.

Karen had fallen back behind the stove, with eyes that peeped dreadfully between her fingers. And there was no more screaming now. Blum had his left forearm under the Neapolitan's nape, and his right palm was pressed on his forehead. He was looking at him earnestly, attentively. And he had ceased to speak. Why should he speak ? Words were things used up and outworn by others. To creep in midwinter round the cornice of the Huldhorn had been one of his words. And this was its companion word, that he was doing now.

Then my heart stood still as I saw the slow grope of his powerful hand along the floor. In a flash I knew beforehand what he intended to do. I tried to kick at the hand, but once more I was too late. I looked wildly round. Karen had sunk to the floor by the stove, but I saw her raise her head. . . .

And that at least—her seeing what I foresaw—I *could* stop. Those blue, already overburdened eyes were not made for *that*. I do not know whether or not I was in time. I sprang to the middle of the room and with my unhurt hand dashed out the incandescent.

I dash out the light from this page, too. As the player rises from the board without making the final move, as the pattern is all there without the addition of the last piece of all, so let it be with the tale. Say—I do not know—that the whole thing took ten minutes, half an hour, an hour, before the silence came. It was in the dead silence that I heard Blum get up from the floor. I heard his feet pass me, heard his groping in some cupboard behind me. There were sounds as he did something in the middle of the room.

Then suddenly the hut was flooded with the light of the new bulb he had fitted.

My eyes rested on Karen first. She lay on her back, wide-eyed and still. I had heard no sound from her—believe me, if you had been there you would have had ears for one set of sounds only—but deep in her breast was Walther's slenderest carving-chisel. He was standing there, but he had not yet seen her ; he was looking down at his other piece of work. I think, when I remember the cleared table at which Karen had sat, that he had intended to make a man-to-man business of it. He had cleared away all other weapons, intending to finish him with his hands, and Karen had probably hidden the thin chisel somewhere about her. But what I saw I seemed already to have known. Only the arm of the statuette

was to be seen, the one that had broken off when it had fallen from behind the door. All else of that thing of loveliness was indistinguishable from the rest of the red on the floor. Blum had broken it to splinters in cramming it where he conceived it to belong—where he conceived the smile itself to belong—in between Nicolo's white teeth and down his throat.

THE LOVELY LADY

By D. H. Lawrence

At seventy-two, Pauline Attenborough could still sometimes be mistaken, in the half-light, for thirty. She really was a wonderfully-preserved woman, of perfect *chic*. Of course it helps a great deal to have the right frame. She would be an exquisite skeleton, and her skull would be an exquisite skull, like that of some Etruscan woman with feminine charm still in the swerve of the bone and the pretty, naïve teeth.

Mrs. Attenborough's face was of the perfect oval and slightly flat type that wears best. There is no flesh to sag. Her nose rode serenely, in its finely-bridged curve. Only the big grey eyes were a tiny bit prominent, on the surface of her face, and they gave her away most. The bluish lids were heavy, as if they ached sometimes with the strain of keeping the eyes beneath them arch and bright; and at the corners of the eyes were fine little wrinkles which would slacken into haggardness, then be pulled up tense again to that bright, gay look like a Leonardo woman who really could laugh outright.

Her niece Cecilia was perhaps the only person in the world who was aware of the invisible little wire which connected Pauline's eye-wrinkles with Pauline's will-power. Only Cecilia consciously watched the eyes go haggard and old and tired, and remain so, for hours; until Robert came home. Then ping!—the mysterious little wire that worked between Pauline's will and her face went taut, the weary, haggard, prominent eyes suddenly

began to gleam, the eyelids arched, the queer, curved eyebrows which floated in such frail arches on Pauline's forehead began to gather a mocking significance, and you had the *real* lovely lady, in all her charm.

She really had the secret of everlasting youth; that is to say, she could don her youth again like an eagle. But she was sparing of it. She was wise enough not to try being young for too many people. Her son Robert, in the evenings, and Sir Wilfrid Knipe sometimes in the afternoon to tea; then occasional visitors on Sunday, when Robert was home—for these she was her lovely and changeless self, that age could not wither, nor custom stale; so bright and kindly and yet subtly mocking, like Mona Lisa, who knew a thing or two. But Pauline knew more, so she needn't be smug at all. She could laugh that lovely, mocking Bacchante laugh of hers, which was at the same time never malicious, always good-naturedly tolerant, both of virtues and vices—the former, of course, taking much more tolerating. So she suggested, roguishly.

Only with her niece Cecilia she did not trouble to keep up the glamour. Ciss was not very observant, anyhow; and, more than that, she was plain; more still, she was in love with Robert; and most of all, she was thirty, and dependent on her aunt Pauline. Oh, Cecilia—why make music for her?

Cecilia, called by her aunt and by her cousin Robert just Ciss, like a cat spitting, was a big, dark-complexioned, pug-faced young woman who very rarely spoke, and when she did couldn't get it out. She was the daughter of a poor Congregational clergyman who had been, while he lived, brother to Ronald, Aunt Pauline's husband. Ronald and the Congregational minister were both well dead, and Aunt Pauline had had charge of Ciss for the last five years.

They lived all together in a quite exquisite though rather small Queen Anne house some twenty-five miles

out of town, secluded in a little dale, and surrounded by small but very quaint and pleasant grounds. It was an ideal place and an ideal life for Aunt Pauline, at the age of seventy-two. When the kingfishers flashed up the little stream in her garden, going under the alders, something still flashed in her heart. She was that kind of woman.

Robert, who was two years older than Ciss, went every day to town, to his chambers in one of the Inns. He was a barrister, and, to his secret but very deep mortification, he earned about a hundred pounds a year. He simply *couldn't* get above that figure, though it was rather easy to get below it. Of course, it didn't matter. Pauline had money. But then, what was Pauline's was Pauline's, and though she could give almost lavishly, still, one was always aware of having a *lovely* and *undeserved* present made to one. Presents are so much nicer when they're undeserved, Aunt Pauline would say.

Robert, too, was plain, and almost speechless. He was medium sized, rather broad and stout, though not fat. Only his creamy, clean-shaven face was rather fat, and sometimes suggestive of an Italian priest, in its silence and its secrecy. But he had grey eyes like his mother, but very shy and uneasy, not bold like hers. Perhaps Ciss was the only person who fathomed his awful shyness and *malaise*, his habitual feeling that he was in the wrong place: almost like a soul that has got into a wrong body. But he never did anything about it. He went up to Chambers, and read law. It was, however, all the weird old processes that interested him. He had, unknown to everybody but his mother, a quite extraordinary collection of old Mexican legal documents—reports of processes and trials, pleas, accusations: the weird and awful mixture of ecclesiastical law and common law in seventeenth-century Mexico. He had started a study in this direction through coming across the report of a trial of two English sailors, for murder, in Mexico, in 1620, and he had gone on, when the next document

was an accusation against a Don Miguel Estrada for seducing one of the nuns of the Sacred Heart Convent in Qaxaca in 1680.

Pauline and her son Robert had wonderful evenings with these old papers. The lovely lady knew a little Spanish. She even looked a trifle Spanish herself, with a high comb and a marvellous dark-brown shawl embroidered in thick silvery silk embroidery. So she would sit at the perfect old table, soft as velvet in its deep brown surface, a high comb in her hair, ear-rings with dropping pendants in her ears, her arms bare and still beautiful, a few strings of pearls round her throat, a puce velvet dress on and this or another beautiful shawl, and by candlelight she looked, yes, a Spanish high-bred beauty of thirty-two or three. She set the candles to give her face just the chiaroscuro she knew suited her; her high chair that rose behind her face was done in old green brocade, against which her face emerged like a Christmas rose.

They were always three at table, and they always drank a bottle of champagne: Pauline two glasses, Ciss two glasses, Robert the rest. The lovely lady sparkled and was radiant. Ciss, her black hair bobbed, her broad shoulders in a very nice and becoming dress that Aunt Pauline had helped her to make, stared from her aunt to her cousin and back again, with rather confused, mute hazel eyes, and played the part of an audience suitably impressed. She *was* impressed, somewhere, all the time. And even rendered speechless by Pauline's brilliancy, even after five years. But at the bottom of her consciousness was the *data* of as weird a document as Robert ever studied: all the things she knew about her aunt and her cousin.

Robert was always a gentleman, with an old-fashioned, punctilious courtesy that covered his shyness quite completely. He was, and Ciss knew it, more confused than shy. He was worse than she was. Cecilia's own con-

fusion dated from only five years back. Robert's must have started before he was born. In the lovely lady's womb he must have felt *very* confused.

He paid all his attention to his mother, drawn to her as a humble flower to the sun. And yet, priest-like, he was all the time aware, with the tail of his consciousness, that Ciss was there, and that she was a bit shut out of it, and that something wasn't right. He was aware of the third consciousness in the room. Whereas to Pauline, her niece Cecilia was an appropriate part of her own setting, rather than a distinct consciousness.

Robert took coffee with his mother and Ciss in the warm drawing-room, where all the furniture was so lovely, all collectors' pieces—Mrs. Attenborough had made her own money, dealing privately in pictures and furniture and rare things from barbaric countries—and the three talked desultorily till about eight or half-past. It was very pleasant, very cosy, very homely even; Pauline made a real home cosiness out of so much elegant material. The chat was simple, and nearly always bright. Pauline was her *real* self, emanating a friendly mockery and an odd, ironic gaiety—till there came a little pause.

At which Ciss always rose and said good-night, and carried out the coffee-tray, to prevent Burnett from intruding any more.

And then! ah, then, the lovely, glowing intimacy of the evening, between mother and son, when they deciphered manuscripts and discussed points, Pauline with that eagerness of a girl for which she was famous. And it was quite genuine. In some mysterious way she had *saved up* her power for being thrilled, in connection with a man. Robert, solid, rather quiet and subdued, seemed like the elder of the two—almost like a priest with a young girl pupil. And that was rather how he felt.

Ciss had a flat for herself just across the courtyard, over the old coach-house and stables. There were no horses. Robert kept his car in the coach-house. Ciss

had three very nice rooms up there, stretching along in a row one after the other, and she had got used to the ticking of the stable clock.

But sometimes she did not go to her rooms. In the summer she would sit on the lawn, and from the open window of the drawing-room upstairs she would hear Pauline's wonderful, heart-searching laugh. And in winter the young woman would put on a thick coat and walk slowly to the little balustraded bridge over the stream, and then look back at the three lighted windows of that drawing-room where mother and son were so happy together.

Ciss loved Robert, and she believed that Pauline intended the two of them to marry—when she was dead. But poor Robert, he was so convulsed with shyness already, with man or woman. What would he be when his mother was dead?—in a dozen more years. He would be just a shell, the shell of a man who had never lived.

The strange, unspoken sympathy of the young with one another, when they are overshadowed by the old, was one of the bonds between Robert and Ciss. But another bond, which Ciss did not know how to draw tight, was the bond of passion. Poor Robert was by nature a passionate man. His silence and his agonised, though hidden, shyness were both the result of a secret physical passionateness. And how Pauline could play on this! Ah, Ciss was not blind to the eyes which he fixed on his mother—eyes fascinated yet humiliated, full of shame. He was ashamed that he was not a man. And he did not love his mother. He was fascinated by her. Completely fascinated. And for the rest, paralysed in a life-long confusion.

Ciss stayed in the garden till the lights leapt up in Pauline's bedroom—about ten o'clock. The lovely lady had retired. Robert would now stay another hour or so, alone. Then he, too, would retire. Ciss, in the dark outside, sometimes wished she could creep up to him and

say: "Oh, Robert! It's all wrong!" But Aunt Pauline would hear. And, anyhow, Ciss couldn't do it. She went off to her own rooms, once more, once more, and so for ever.

In the morning coffee was brought up on a tray to each of the rooms of the three relatives. Ciss had to be at Sir Wilfrid Knipe's at nine o'clock, to give two hours' lessons to his little grand-daughter. It was her sole serious occupation, except that she played the piano for the love of it. Robert set off to town about nine. And as a rule, Aunt Pauline appeared to lunch, though sometimes not till tea-time. When she appeared, she looked fresh and young. But she was inclined to fade rather rapidly, like a flower without water, in the daytime. Her hour was the candle hour.

So she always rested in the afternoon. When the sun shone, if possible she took a sun-bath. This was one of her secrets. Her lunch was very light; she could take her sun-and-air-bath before noon or after, as it pleased her. Often it was in the afternoon, when the sun shone very warmly into a queer little yew-walled square just behind the stables. Here Ciss stretched out the lying-chair and rugs, and put the light parasol handy in the silent little enclosure of thick dark yew-hedges beyond the old red walls of the unused stables. And hither came the lovely lady with her book. Ciss then had to be on guard in one of her own rooms, should her aunt, who was very keen-eared, hear a footstep.

One afternoon it occurred to Cecilia that she herself might while away this rather long afternoon hour by taking a sun-bath. She was growing restive. The thought of the flat roof of the stable buildings, to which she could climb from a loft at the end, started her on a new adventure. She often went on to the roof; she had to, to wind up the stable clock, which was a job she had assumed to herself. Now she took a rug, climbed out under the heavens, looked at the sky and the great elm-tops, looked at the

sun, then took off her things and lay down perfectly securely, in a corner of the roof under the parapet, full in the sun.

It was rather lovely, to bask all one's length like this in warm sun and air. Yes, it was very lovely! It even seemed to melt some of the hard bitterness of her heart, some of that core of unspoken resentment which never dissolved. Luxuriously, she spread herself, so that the sun should touch her limbs fully, fully. If she had no other lover, she should have the sun! She rolled over voluptuously.

And suddenly her heart stood still in her body, and her hair almost rose on end as a voice said very softly, musingly, in her ear:

"No, Henry dear! It was not my fault you died instead of marrying that Claudia. No, darling. I was quite, quite willing for you to marry her, unsuitable though she was."

Cecilia sank down on her rug, powerless and perspiring with dread. That awful voice, so soft, so musing, yet so unnatural. Not a human voice at all. Yet there must, there *must* be someone on the roof! Oh, how unspeakably awful!

She lifted her weak head and peeped across the sloping leads. Nobody! The chimneys were too narrow to shelter anybody. There was nobody on the roof. Then it must be someone in the trees, in the elms. Either that, or—terror unspeakable—a bodiless voice! She reared her head a little higher.

And as she did so, came the voice again:

"No, darling! I told you you would tire of her in six months. And you see it was true, dear. It was true, true, true! I wanted to spare you that. So it wasn't I who made you feel weak and disabled, wanting that very silly Claudia—poor thing, she looked so woebegone afterwards!—wanting her and not wanting her. You got yourself into that perplexity, my dear. I only

warned you. What else could I do? And you lost your spirit and died without ever knowing me again. It was bitter, bitter——"

The voice faded away. Cecilia subsided weakly on to her rug, after the anguished tension of listening. Oh, it was awful. The sun shone, the sky was blue, all seemed so lovely and afternoony and summery. And yet, oh, horror!—she was going to be forced to believe in the supernatural! And she loathed the supernatural, ghosts and voices and rappings and all the rest.

But that awful, creepy, bodiless voice, with its rusty sort of whispers of an overtone! It had something so fearfully familiar in it, too! And yet was so utterly uncanny. Poor Cecilia could only lie there unclothed, and so all the more agonisingly helpless, inert, collapsed in sheer dread.

And then she heard the thing sigh!—a deep sigh that seemed weirdly familiar, yet was not human. "Ah well, ah well! the heart must bleed. Better it should bleed than break. It is grief, grief! But it wasn't my fault, dear. And Robert could marry our poor, dull Ciss tomorrow, if he wanted her. But he doesn't care about it, so why force him into anything?" The sounds were very uneven, sometimes only a husky sort of whisper. Listen! Listen!

Cecilia was about to give vent to loud and piercing screams of hysteria, when the last two sentences arrested her. All her caution and her cunning sprang alert. It was Aunt Pauline! It *must* be Aunt Pauline, practising ventriloquism, or something like that. What a devil she was!

Where was she? She must be lying down there, right below where Cecilia herself was lying. And it was either some fiend's trick of ventriloquism, or else thought-transference. The sounds were very uneven; sometimes quite inaudible, sometimes only a brushing sort of noise. Ciss listened intently. No, it could not be ventriloquism.

It was worse: some form of thought-transference that conveyed itself like sound. Some horror of that sort! Cecilia still lay weak and inert, too terrified to move; but she was growing calmer with suspicion. It was some diabolic trick of that unnatural woman.

But *what* a devil of a woman! She even knew that she, Cecilia, had mentally accused her of killing her son Henry. Poor Henry was Robert's elder brother, twelve years older than Robert. He had died suddenly when he was twenty-two, after an awful struggle with himself, because he was passionately in love with a young and very good-looking actress, and his mother had humorously despised him for the attachment. So he had caught some sudden ordinary disease, but the poison had gone to his brain and killed him before he ever regained consciousness. Ciss knew the few facts from her own father. And lately she had been thinking that Pauline was going to kill Robert as she had killed Henry. It was clear murder: a mother murdering her sensitive sons, who were fascinated by her: the Circe!

"I suppose I may as well get up," murmured the dim, unbreathing voice. "Too much sun is as bad as too little. Enough sun, enough love-thrill, enough proper food, and not too much of any of them, and a woman might live for ever. I verily believe, for ever. If she absorbs as much vitality as she expends. Or perhaps a trifle more!"

It was certainly Aunt Pauline! How—how terrible! She, Ciss, was hearing Aunt Pauline's thoughts. Oh, how ghastly! Aunt Pauline was sending out her thoughts in a sort of radio, and she, Ciss, had to *hear* what her aunt was thinking. How ghastly! How insufferable! One of them would surely have to die.

She twisted and lay inert and crumpled, staring vacantly in front of her. Vacantly! Vacantly! And her eyes were staring almost into a hole. She was staring in it unseeing, a hole going down in the corner, from the lead

gutter. It meant nothing to her. Only it frightened her a little more.

When suddenly, out of the hole came a sigh and a last whisper: "Ah well! Pauline! Get up, it's enough for to-day." Good God! Out of the hole of the rain-pipe! The rain-pipe was acting as a speaking-tube! Impossible! No, quite possible. She had read of it even in some book. And Aunt Pauline, like the old and guilty woman she was, talked aloud to herself. That was it!

A sullen exultance sprang in Ciss's breast. *That* was why she would never have anybody, not even Robert, in her bedroom. That was why she never dozed in a chair, never sat absent-minded anywhere, but went to her room, and kept to her room, except when she roused herself to be alert. When she slackened off she talked to herself! She talked in a soft little crazy voice to herself. But she was not crazy. It was only her thoughts murmuring themselves aloud.

So she had qualms about poor Henry! Well she might have! Ciss believed that Aunt Pauline had loved her big, handsome, brilliant first-born much more than she loved Robert, and that his death had been a terrible blow and a chagrin to her. Poor Robert had been only ten years old when Henry died. Since then he had been the substitute.

Ah, how awful!

But Aunt Pauline was a strange woman. She had left her husband when Henry was a small child, some years even before Robert was born. There was no quarrel. Sometimes she saw her husband again, quite amiably, but a little mockingly. And she even gave him money.

For Pauline earned all her own. Her father had been a Consul in the East and in Napies, and a devoted collector of beautiful exotic things. When he died, soon after his grandson Henry was born, he left his collection of treasures to his daughter. And Pauline, who had really a passion and a genius for loveliness, whether in texture or form

or colour, had laid the basis of her fortune on her father's collection. She had gone on collecting, buying where she could, and selling to collectors or to museums. She was one of the first to sell old, weird African figures to the museums, and ivory carvings from New Guinea. She bought Renoir as soon as she saw his pictures. But not Rousseau. And all by herself she made a fortune.

After her husband died she had not married again. She was not even *known* to have had lovers. If she did have lovers, it was not among the men who admired her most and paid her devout and open attendance. To these she was a " friend."

Cecilia slipped on her clothes and caught up her rug, hastening carefully down the ladder to the loft. As she descended she heard the ringing, musical call : " All right, Ciss "—which meant that the lovely lady was finished, and returning to the house. Even her voice was wonderfully young and sonorous, beautifully balanced and self-possessed. So different from the little voice in which she talked to herself. *That* was much more the voice of an old woman.

Ciss hastened round to the yew enclosure, where lay the comfortable *chaise longue* with the various delicate rugs. Everything Pauline had was choice, to the fine straw mat on the floor. The great yew walls were beginning to cast long shadows. Only in the corner where the rugs tumbled their delicate colours was there hot, still sunshine.

The rugs folded up, the chair lifted away, Cecilia stooped to look at the mouth of the rain-pipe. There it was, in the corner, under a little hood of masonry and just projecting from the thick leaves of the creeper on the wall. If Pauline, lying there, turned her face towards the wall, she would speak into the very mouth of the tube. Cecilia was reassured. She had heard her aunt's thoughts indeed, but by no uncanny agency.

That evening, as if aware of something, Pauline was a

little quieter than usual, though she looked her own serene, rather mysterious self. And after coffee she said to Robert and Ciss :

" I'm so sleepy. The sun has made me so sleepy. I feel full of sunshine like a bee. I shall go to bed, if you don't mind. You two sit and have a talk."

Cecilia looked quickly at her cousin.

" Perhaps you'd rather be alone ? " she said to him.

" No—no," he replied. " Do keep me company for a while, if it doesn't bore you."

The windows were open, the scent of honeysuckle wafted in, with the sound of an owl. Robert smoked in silence. There was a sort of despair in his motionless, rather squat body. He looked like a caryatid bearing a weight.

" Do you remember Cousin Henry ? " Cecilia asked him suddenly.

He looked up in surprise.

" Yes. Very well," he said.

" What did he look like ? " she said, glancing into her cousin's big, secret-troubled eyes, in which there was so much frustration.

" Oh, he was handsome : tall, and fresh-coloured, with mother's soft brown hair." As a matter of fact, Pauline's hair was grey. " The ladies admired him very much ; he was at all the dances."

" And what kind of character had he ? "

" Oh, very good-natured and jolly. He liked to be amused. He was rather quick and clever, like mother, and very good company."

" And did he love your mother ? "

" Very much. She loved him too—better than she does me, as a matter of fact. He was so much more nearly her idea of a man."

" Why was he more her idea of a man ? "

" Tall—handsome—attractive, and very good company —and would, I believe, have been very successful at law. I'm afraid I am merely negative in all those respects."

Ciss looked at him attentively, with her slow-thinking hazel eyes. Under his impassive mask she knew he suffered.

"Do you think you are so much more negative than he?" she said.

He did not lift his face. But after a few moments he replied:

"My life, certainly, is a negative affair."

She hesitated before she dared ask him:

"And do you mind?"

He did not answer her at all. Her heart sank.

"You see, I'm afraid my life is as negative as yours is," she said. "And I'm beginning to mind bitterly. I'm thirty."

She saw his creamy, well-bred hand tremble.

"I suppose," he said, without looking at her, "one will rebel when it is too late."

That was queer, from him.

"Robert!" she said. "Do you like me at all?"

She saw his dusky-creamy face, so changeless in its folds, go pale.

"I am very fond of you," he murmured.

"Won't you kiss me? Nobody ever kisses me," she said pathetically.

He looked at her, his eyes strange with fear and a certain haughtiness. Then he rose, and came softly over to her, and kissed her gently on the cheek.

"It's an awful shame, Ciss!" he said softly.

She caught his hand and pressed it to her breast.

"And sit with me sometimes in the garden," she said, murmuring with difficulty. "Won't you?"

He looked at her anxiously and searchingly.

"What about mother?"

Ciss smiled a funny little smile, and looked into his eyes. He suddenly flushed crimson, turning aside his face. It was a painful sight.

"I know," he said. "I am no lover of women."

He spoke with sarcastic stoicism, against himself, but even she did not know the shame it was to him.

"You never try to be," she said.

Again his eyes changed uncannily.

"Does one have to try?" he said.

"Why, yes. One never does anything if one doesn't try."

He went pale again.

"Perhaps you are right," he said.

In a few minutes she left him, and went to her rooms. At least she had tried to take off the everlasting lid from things.

The weather continued sunny, Pauline continued her sun-baths, and Ciss lay on the roof eavesdropping, in the literal sense of the word. But Pauline was not to be heard. No sound came up the pipe. She must be lying with her face away into the open. Ciss listened with all her might. She could just detect the faintest, faintest murmur away below, but no audible syllable.

And at night, under the stars, Cecilia sat and waited in silence, on the seat which kept in view the drawing-room windows and the side door into the garden. She saw the light go up in her aunt's room. She saw the lights at last go out in the drawing-room. And she waited. But he did not come. She stayed on in the darkness half the night, while the owl hooted. But she stayed alone.

Two days she heard nothing; her aunt's thoughts were not revealed; and at evening nothing happened. Then, the second night, as she sat with heavy, helpless persistence in the garden, suddenly she started. He had come out. She rose and went softly over the grass to him.

"Don't speak!" he murmured.

And in silence, in the dark, they walked down the garden and over the little bridge to the paddock, where the hay, cut very late, was in cock. There they stood disconsolate under the stars.

"You see," he said, "how can I ask for love, if I don't

feel any love in myself? You know I have a real regard for you——"

"How *can* you feel any love, when you never feel anything?" she said.

"That is true," he replied.

And she waited for what next.

"And how can I marry?" he said. "I am a failure even at making money. I can't ask my mother for money."

She sighed deeply.

"Then don't bother yet about marrying," she said. "Only love me a little. Won't you?"

He gave a short laugh.

"It sounds so atrocious, to say it is hard to begin," he said.

She sighed again. He was so stiff to move.

"Shall we sit down a minute?" she said. And then, as they sat on the hay, she added: "May I touch you? Do you mind?"

"Yes, I mind. But do as you wish," he replied, with that mixture of shyness and queer candour which made him a little ridiculous, as he knew quite well. But in his heart there was almost murder.

She touched his black, always tidy, hair with her fingers.

"I suppose I shall rebel one day," he said again suddenly.

They sat some time, till it grew chilly. And he held her hand fast, but he never put his arms round her. At last she rose, and went indoors, saying good-night.

The next day, as Cecilia lay stunned and angry on the roof, taking her sun-bath, and becoming hot and fierce with sunshine, suddenly she started. A terror seized her in spite of herself. It was the voice.

"Caro, caro, tu non l'hai visto!" it was murmuring away, in a language Cecilia did not understand. She lay and writhed her limbs in the sun, listening intently to

words she could not follow. Softly, whisperingly, with infinite caressiveness and yet with that subtle, insidious arrogance under its velvet, came the voice, murmuring in Italian: "Bravo, si, molto bravo, poverino, ma uomo come te non sarà mai, mai, mai!" Oh, especially in Italian Cecilia heard the poisonous charm of the voice, so caressive, so soft and flexible, yet so utterly egoistic. She hated it with intensity as it sighed and whispered out of nowhere. Why, why should it be so delicate, so subtle and flexible and beautifully controlled, when she herself was so clumsy? Oh, poor Cecilia, she writhed in the afternoon sun, knowing her own clownish clumsiness and lack of suavity, in comparison.

"No, Robert dear, you will never be the man your father was, though you have some of his looks. He was a marvellous lover, soft as a flower yet piercing as a humming-bird. Cara, cara mia bellissima, ti hoaspettato come l'agonissante aspetta la morte, morte deliziosa, quasi quasi troppo deliziosa per una mera anima humana. He gave himself to a woman as he gave himself to God. Mauro! Mauro! How you loved me! How you loved me!"

The voice ceased in reverie, and Cecilia knew what she had guessed before—that Robert was not the son of her Uncle Ronald, but of some Italian.

"I am disappointed in you, Robert. There is no poignancy in you. Your father was a Jesuit, but he was the most perfect and poignant lover in the world. You are a Jesuit like a fish in a tank. And that Ciss of yours is the cat fishing for you. It is less edifying even than poor Henry."

Cecilia suddenly bent her mouth down to the tube, and said in a deep voice:

"Leave Robert alone! Don't kill him as well."

There was dead silence in the hot July afternoon that was lowering for thunder. Cecilia lay prostrate, her heart beating in great thumps. She was listening as if her

whole soul were an ear. At last she caught the whisper :

" Did someone speak ? "

She leaned again to the mouth of the tube :

" Don't kill Robert as you killed me," she said, with slow enunciation, and a deep but small voice.

" Ah ! " came the sharp little cry. " Who is that speaking ? "

" Henry," said the deep voice.

There was dead silence. Poor Cecilia lay with all the use gone out of her. And there was dead silence. Till at last came the whisper :

" I didn't kill Henry. No, no ! No, no ! Henry, surely you can't blame me ! I loved you, dearest ; I only wanted to help you."

" You killed me ! " came the deep, artificial, accusing voice. " Now let Robert live. Let him go ! Let him marry ! "

There was a pause.

" How very, very awful ! " mused the whispering voice. " Is it possible, Henry, you are a spirit, and you condemn me ? "

" Yes, I condemn you ! "

Cecilia felt all the pent-up rage going down that rain-pipe. At the same time, she almost laughed. It was awful.

She lay and listened and listened. No sound ! As if time had ceased, she lay inert in the weakening sun, till she heard a far-off rumble of thunder. She sat up. The sky was yellowing. Quickly she dressed herself, went down, and out to the corner of the stables.

" Aunt Pauline ! " she called discreetly. " Did you hear thunder ? "

" Yes. I am going in. Don't wait," came a feeble voice.

Cecilia retired, and from the loft watched, spying, as the figure of the lovely lady, wrapped in a lovely wrap of old blue silk, went rather totteringly to the house.

The sky gradually darkened. Cecilia hastened in with the rugs. Then the storm broke. Aunt Pauline did not appear to tea. She found the thunder trying. Robert also did not arrive till after tea, in the pouring rain. Cecilia went down the covered passage to her own house, and dressed carefully for dinner, putting some white columbines at her breast.

The drawing-room was lit with a softly-shaded lamp. Robert, dressed, was waiting, listening to the rain. He too seemed strangely crackling and on edge. Cecilia came in, with the white flowers nodding at her dusky breast. Robert was watching her curiously, a new look on his face. Cecilia went to the bookshelves near the door, and was peering for something, listening acutely. She heard a rustle, then the door softly opening. And as it opened, Ciss suddenly switched on the strong electric light by the door.

Her aunt, in a dress of black lace over ivory colour, stood in the doorway. Her face was made up, but haggard with a look of unspeakable irritability, as if years of suppressed exasperation and dislike of her fellow-men had suddenly crumpled her into an old witch.

"Oh, aunt!" cried Cecilia.

"Why, mother, you're a little old lady!" came the astounded voice of Robert—like an astonished boy, as if it were a joke.

"Have you only just found it out?" snapped the old woman venomously.

"Yes! Why, I thought——" his voice tailed out in misgiving.

The haggard, old Pauline, in a frenzy of exasperation, said:

"Aren't we going down?"

She had not even noticed the excess of light, a thing she shunned. And she went downstairs almost tottering.

At table she sat with her face like a crumpled mask of unspeakable irritability. She looked old, very old, and like a witch. Robert and Cecilia fetched furtive glances at her. And Ciss, watching Robert, saw that he was so astonished and repelled by his mother's looks that he was another man.

"What kind of a drive home did you have?" snapped Pauline, with an almost gibbering irritability.

"It rained, of course," he said.

"How clever of you to have found that out!" said his mother, with the grisly grin of malice that had succeeded her arch smile.

"I don't understand," he said, with quiet suavity.

"It's apparent," said his mother, rapidly and sloppily eating her food.

She rushed through the meal like a crazy dog, to the utter consternation of the servant. And the moment it was over she darted in a queer, crab-like way upstairs. Robert and Cecilia followed her, thunderstruck, like two conspirators.

"You pour the coffee. I loathe it! I'm going. Good-night!" said the old woman, in a succession of sharp shots. And she scrambled out of the room.

There was a dead silence. At last he said:

"I'm afraid mother isn't well. I must persuade her to see a doctor."

"Yes," said Cecilia.

The evening passed in silence. Robert and Ciss stayed on in the drawing-room, having lit a fire. Outside was cold rain. Each pretended to read. They did not want to separate. The evening passed with ominous mysteriousness, yet quickly.

At about ten o'clock the door suddenly opened, and Pauline appeared, in a blue wrap. She shut the door behind her, and came to the fire. Then she looked at the two young people in hate, real hate.

"You two had better get married quickly," she said,

in an ugly voice. "It would look more decent; such a passionate pair of lovers!"

Robert looked up at her quietly.

"I thought you believed that cousins should not marry, mother," he said.

"I do. But you're not cousins. Your father was an Italian priest." Pauline held her daintily-slippered foot to the fire, in an old coquettish gesture. Her body tried to repeat all the old graceful gestures. But the nerve had snapped, so it was a rather dreadful caricature.

"Is that really true, mother?" he asked.

"True! What do you think? He was a distinguished man, or he wouldn't have been my lover. He was far too distinguished a man to have had you for a son. But that joy fell to me."

"How unfortunate all round," he said slowly.

"Unfortunate for you? *You* were lucky. It was *my* misfortune," she said acidly to him.

She was really a dreadful sight, like a piece of lovely Venetian glass that has been dropped and gathered up again in horrible, sharp-edged fragments.

Suddenly she left the room again.

For a week it went on. She did not recover. It was as if every nerve in her body had suddenly started screaming in an insanity of discordance. The doctor came, and gave her sedatives, for she never slept. Without drugs she never slept at all, only paced back and forth in her room, looking hideous and evil, reeking with malevolence. She could not bear to see either her son or her niece. Only when either of them came she asked, in pure malice:

"Well! When's the wedding? Have you celebrated the nuptials yet?"

At first Cecilia was stunned by what she had done. She realised vaguely that her aunt, once a definite thrust of condemnation had penetrated her beautiful armour, had just collapsed, squirming, inside her shell. It was too

terrible. Ciss was almost terrified into repentance. Then she thought: "This is what she always was. Now let her live the rest of her days in her true colours."

But Pauline would not live long. She was literally shrivelling away. She kept her room, and saw no one. She had her mirrors taken away.

Robert and Cecilia sat a good deal together. The jeering of the mad Pauline had not driven them apart, as she had hoped. But Cecilia dared not confess to him what she had done.

"Do you think your mother ever loved anybody?" Ciss asked him tentatively, rather wistfully, one evening.

He looked at her fixedly.

"Herself!" he said at last.

"She didn't even *love* herself," said Ciss. "It was something else. What was it?" She lifted a troubled, utterly puzzled face to him.

"Power," he said curtly.

"But what power?" she asked. "I don't understand."

"Power to feed on other lives," he said bitterly. "She was beautiful, and she fed on life. She has fed on me as she fed on Henry. She put a sucker into one's soul, and sucked up one's essential life."

"And don't you forgive her?"

"No."

"Poor Aunt Pauline!"

But even Ciss did not mean it. She was only aghast.

"I *know* I've got a heart," he said, passionately striking his breast. "But it's almost sucked dry. I *know* I've got a soul, somewhere. But it's gnawed bare. I *hate* people who want power over others."

Ciss was silent. What was there to say?

And two days later Pauline was found dead in her bed, having taken too much veronal, for her heart was weakened.

From the grave even she hit back at her son and her niece. She left Robert the noble sum of one thousand pounds, and Ciss one hundred. All the rest, with the nucleus of her valuable antiques, went to form the "Pauline Attenborough Museum."

THE HOSPITAL NURSE

A STUDY IN MURDER

By Shane Leslie

Miss Turberah Doole was the middle-aged, hard-worked, uninteresting and unenterprising nurse and slavey employed by Hosanna Smith to tend Mrs. Smith's father, old Sir Athelstone Penguin, the master-plumber, who, by an ingenious series of inventions, had collected half the Royal Blasonry of Christendom on his Appointments. In his senility he had added Arms of his own to the venerable collection of Burke. His fortune was large and his family was small. There was a disinherited son in Australia, Edward, who had speculated so considerably on his father's death that his father had cut him off in his own lifetime. His dull but inexpensive daughter and the good-or-bad-for-nothing husband she had bought for herself on an excursion to Switzerland, lived like a pair of caretakers or sentries in his gaunt Palladian House a couple of miles outside Reading. As far as the baronet's health was concerned they were caretakers, but of his fortune they were sentries. They watched against the return of the prodigal son. They had watched for ten years, day and night, post after post. One of them had always been within reach of the telephone, and telegrams were humanely opened before they could give the old man any kind of shock.

It was very unlikely that the son would return after a career which had been continued in the Antipodes long

after his enforced trip from the old country and the old folks at home. His mother had since died of her son's and husband's behaviour in equal parts, and her death had extinguished the last flicker of daughterly love on the part of Mrs. Smith for her father. Edward had never acknowledged the notification of his mother's death, but continued to sully the old name in the Australian dust. No longer able to pledge and pawn Sir Athelstone's credit, he had danced, drunk, devilled and disappeared. Hosanna's husband, Jordan, developed an unsuspected interest in keeping the family annals, and all that could be recorded to Edward's discredit by letter or by news-cutting was kept in a black copy-book to refresh the baronet's memory if need arose.

Nurse Doole was seldom disturbed of a morning by the family, who left her about her duties. She was surprised when Mr. Smith interrupted her once before noon and asked for *The Times*, which she generally read to her patient in the course of the day. He brought it back with a paragraph cut out by scissors. Three days later *The Times* was brought to her with an excision previously committed.

She was a harmless old soul with one ambition and one vice. Her ambition was the cottage she intended buying with her savings at the end of this case, and her vice was curiosity. It was her curiosity to know what had been cut from *The Times*, which was to change her whole life. As she went only to Reading on Sundays, she saw no way of securing that cutting except by letting Sir Athelstone notice the gap. She read several paragraphs to him through the missing square. When he noticed, he was very angry and stopped her reading. He examined the sheet and ordered the butler to be sent into Reading for a clean copy. Her curiosity was gratified an hour later by reading aloud a few sentences reporting the sudden rise into political fame of the young Australian, who had been selected to join the Imperial Tramway

Visiting Committee and had left the Antipodes with the other members the previous day. They would reach England in six weeks. An interesting rather than a pleasant programme appeared to have been arranged for them. The name of the young politician was Edward Penguin.

All this caused the greatest panic and distress among the Smiths, but as neither they nor the old man mentioned the news, the old life proceeded. Only the nurse's position changed perceptibly. The Smiths no longer treated her as a hireling. They began consulting her. They were particularly anxious to know how the news had affected Sir Athelstone. The nurse reported that he had not turned a hair. The next six weeks became a nightmare for the Smiths, who slept considerably worse than the invalid. The nurse alone slept with a careless content. In a few months she would be able to purchase her cottage. For thirty years she had slaved in ward and hospital and on private cases. Freedom and Respectability, a Cottage and the Crematorium beyond lay comfortably before her. Money she had never had and never would. She could enjoy the sleep denied to the Smiths, whose agonies increased as the possible spoiler of their long-awaited treasure approached.

The return of Edward carried nightmarish possibilities. They knew they were the inheritors in Sir Athelstone's Will, but they knew his pride in his name. They had once offered to assume it after his death by Royal Licence, and he had scorned the idea. The old name must be carried on by son of his but by nobody else. The Smiths knew well his attitude to the idea of sonship and inheritance apart from the filial curse, with which Heaven had visited him. They knew that he was immensely rich. They knew they would be so at his death. They knew they had waited for twenty years. They were ready to wait ten more, but in six weeks this wretched son would have risen from the dead. They could not forbear asking the

nurse once if she thought the old man would live through the summer. They hoped so, they said, because he was so fond of roses. Nurse answered that he would see the last rose of several summers yet. He was not ill, only old.

It was an injudicious question, for it enabled the nurse to read what was in their minds and it gave her a sense of power. She was enjoying the nervous alarm which the Australian Special Correspondent of *The Times* was causing in the household. She had nothing to win or lose herself. She was not in the Will. Whoever inherited the money would pay her her wage and she would buy her cottage. When she thought of the years she had slaved and salved and served for others, she felt a slight anger against the wealthy people who could hire her services for so little. The nervous anxiety of the Smiths, amounting to despair, offered her a form of slight revenge. Four weeks passed and there was a long paragraph in *The Times* about the coming Committee from Australia. This time the Smiths threw away all reserve and Hosanna Smith asked nurse as a favour not to read it to the old man. She could easily skip it. Nurse said nothing, biding her counsel, but an envelope was brought to her at lunch. It contained a five-pound note. For the first time for many months Turberah Doole smiled. The winning game seemed to have been placed in her lap. She would have a garden as well as a cottage in the country by the time this case was over.

She skipped reading the passage about Edward Penguin to his father and reassured the Smiths. A week later she noticed a tiny news item containing the dreaded name, and pointed it out to the Smiths with the malicious query whether she ought to read it aloud or not. That evening her bank account received another five-pound note. The condition of the Smiths was pitiable. They seemed unable to act or think for themselves. They looked to the nurse for initiative. What was the patient thinking or wanting? Did he ever mention his son or his lawyers,

and what could be his feelings? Perhaps he had forgotten. Nurse was never very reassuring, but she went on reading and skipping paragraphs until the very day when the Australian visitors were expected to arrive. An unfortunate scene occurred that day. The aged baronet questioned her. He had been apparently counting the days, and when she hesitated he demanded the paper, which he read for himself. He found all he had looked for. The names of the Australian Committee filled a corner. His son was due to reach Southampton that day. His wrath was considerable and expressed itself in wriggling convulsions. But his wrath was not directed against his son or his nurse, although both had failed him, but against the Smiths.

He sat up and ordered Miss Doole to telephone for his lawyers.

Nurse rushed below. It was half an hour before she could find the Smiths and to both she broke the news.

Hosanna burst into hysterical tears and Mr. Smith "blinked his blee" or, in other words, changed colour. There was a general collapse. Nurse alone stood rock-like. What was she to do? The Smiths weakly bade her get busy on the telephone. Nearly an hour had passed, and before she called for a trunk call she ran upstairs to look at her patient. When she entered Sir Athelstone's bedroom she received her second shock. The baronet lay stretched upon his bed. He lay dead of sheer wrath. The arteries or plumbing of his heart had given way under the stress. Miss Doole did everything that professional humanity or science could suggest. Then she telephoned to the doctor.

As she hung up the telephone, the Smiths came to her in the passage. "Is the lawyer coming?" they asked. Their faces were disconsolate to the lowest state of anguish. She drew them into her own bedroom and her brain worked with fierce rapidity.

"No, I have sent for a doctor instead."

"Why, is he really ill?"

"Dead! dead! dead!"

"Thank God," muttered the injudicious Mr. Smith. Mrs. Smith almost struck him. "Oh, my dear, dear father! Nurse, you must have killed him," and she burst into sobs.

Miss Doole staggered with fear and fury. Her emotions gave her the only brain-wave of her life and she answered: "Well, you both told me to." It was possible that the Smiths attributed the miracle to foul play. Miss Doole suddenly saw her Cottage become a Boarding-House, and a Conservatory added to her Garden. Where there is fear, money becomes fluidic. If the Smiths really thought she was a murderess, she could make them pay for their mistake. "It will be all right, but you must give me a thousand pounds before the funeral. I will go, and trouble you no more," was her ultimatum. The Smiths turned haggardly to face the first peck that was made at the fortune before their own hands could close upon it. They consented and were taken to view the corpse. When the doctor arrived, Sir Athelstone's daughter was kneeling at the foot of the bed in prolonged prayer.

The excitement of waiting for the Will precluded any anxiety the Smiths might have felt over the doctor's investigation. He rapidly pronounced death due to heart failure, and departed after signing his certificate. By the time the Will had been brought by the lawyers from London, a third most interested party had arrived in time to hear the reading of the clauses and codicils. Edward Athelstone arrived in England that morning, and the evening papers were full of the tragic coincidence. Headlines described the race across the ocean of the long-lost son to receive forgiveness at his dying father's bedside.

The deceased baronet had placed a short Will in legal hands. His entire fortune was left to the Smiths, and there was no mention of his son or of his nurse. A large

legacy was set aside to endow the hospital in the Midlands in which he had always been interested. His creed had been strictly utilitarian and, to mark the practice of his lifetime, he bequeathed his body to the same Institution for purposes of dissection, after which all remains were to be interred on the premises—if any remains there were from the laboratory. The codicil affecting his body was a surprise, and Mrs. Smith burst into tears, insisting that her dear father must receive Christian burial. All present were much edified, with the exception of Edward the disinherited. He had preserved a grim silence during the reading of the will, which he realised was final. It was only when the proviso for dissecting his father was opposed by the Smiths that he raised his voice to insist that this wish of his father's should be carried out to the letter. Had some fearful suspicion crossed his mind? Was he hopeful that some damning grains of poison would be found in the body? It was the only chance of invalidating the Will, and he watched filially over his father's body until it was despatched under medical conduct.

That evening Edward's lawyer arrived and advised him to interview the nurse very carefully and friendly-like pending a possible doctor's report from the Middle Midlands Hospital. The lawyer himself left to give a hint to the dissecting doctors. In view of the baronet's bounty they could not be too careful or minute in investigating his atoms. Nearly a quarter of a million had been left to their Institution.

Edward could not have interviewed the nurse at a more fruitful moment than that evening, for she had just been refused the immediate payment of her thousand pounds bonus by the Smiths, who had plucked courage after the doctor's harmless pronouncement. If the nurse had surreptitiously done the baronet out of his few remaining weeks of life, she had employed agencies which left no trace. The Smiths continued to whine for a Christian funeral, ordering the nurse to leave the

following day. A cheque for eighty pounds was handed to her. The amount placed a bare cottage in sight, and she decided to stay until she was pushed out. When Edward interviewed her, she promptly let him know that the old man had been aware of his coming and had sent for his lawyers on the very day that his arrival was scheduled in *The Times*. Edward's foulest suspicions were instantly confirmed. The alarmed and sullen behaviour of the Smiths the next day almost tempted him to send for the police. He waited feverishly for the hospital report, telegraphing to his lawyer to bring back the remains. He had a theory that the sight of the dissected corpse would terrify the Smiths into confession. He had no doubt, no possible doubt now, and, when the nurse allowed the Smiths to know how much she had confessed to Edward, their behaviour passed from distress to distraction. They became as pyschologically convinced as Edward himself that the old man had met with an unnatural end. And that damnable nurse refused to go. She was waiting for her thousand pounds of hush money. They realised that, even if they inherited the fortune, she would blackmail them all their lives. Gradually she would bleed their pockets until the whole fortune was transferred into her lap. They would be lucky if they escaped with their necks! They writhed with mental gangrene.

There was the ghastly atmosphere of a morgue about that noble old Palladian house crowning the heights above Reading. It was three days before the remains of Sir Athelstone were brought back. The dissector had left no flesh upon the bones, and the lawyers were discussing whether the Will would be invalidated unless they were buried as well as the flesh under the walls of the great hospital, which would always bear the baronet's name. The doctors had not found one suspicious atom, though their researches had been conducted under the eyes of Edward's lawyer. There was nothing to be done but to

accept the medical opinion concerning his death and to return or bury the fragments, which were recognisable neither to eye nor nostril, so exhaustively had scalpel and spirit done their work. Mrs. Smith's prayers and tears prevailed and the undertakers were ordered to bring a rich satinwood coffin that night. Before they arrived, Edward left in pursuit of his Australian Committee, which was being entertained at the Mansion House that night. How he became the worse for drink later in the evening and how he met his host, the Lord Mayor, on the Bench the following morning, forms another story, often told in Australian political circles.

The Smiths, Hosanna and Jordan, watched the bones of Sir Athelstone being slowly nailed into the coffin. It was very simple, and the undertakers left the coffin under a pall in the front hall, promising an early return. As the last nail sounded, a heavy gloom seemed to lift from the Smiths, and Hosanna wore a beatific expression worthier to deck a Queen of the May than a mourning daughter. It remained now to deal with Turberah Doole, and in their temporary exultation they decided to pay her her thousand pounds and be done with her on condition that she left before the funeral and signed a paper that she would present no further claims.

Miss Doole was awaiting their offer and quietly doubled it. Two thousand pounds down and the first train to-morrow! The Smiths blanched, but not with fear. Avarice and anger overwhelmed them. They refused point-blank. . . . Miss Doole must have insisted and threatened and bluffed, and Smith must have threatened in reply. Miss Doole must have been determined that if she could not live in comfort for the rest of her life they should swing, all three. She might have been prepared to confess that she had choked the old man at their suggestion soon after he had threatened to send for his lawyers, and presumably to alter his Will. They would become accessories before the fact. Nobody will ever

know. . . . . It was late before the lights were extinguished that night and only a faint whiff of deodorised disinfectants bespoke the morrow's funeral.

The funeral took place with a certain amount of grim grandeur, but there was an absence of friends and neighbours. Some ugly rumours had already circulated. Comment was roused by the absence of Edward, the only son of deceased. The absence of the nurse was not noticed. She had been under notice to leave by the first train. The Smiths, looking very sheepish and sulky, officiated as principal mourners. A large crowd had gathered outside the local churchyard and waited. The Governors of the Middle Midlands Hospital attended in their robes. As the Smiths emerged, a slow perceptible hiss broke through the huddled spectators, followed by silence. Edward's hot tongue had loosed the local gossip.

In the few years which followed they were never able to rid themselves of the scent of foul play. The late Sir Athelstone was often alluded to in the neighbourhood as the "murdered baronet." Two matters of proof were often adduced. One was the disappearance of the nurse with, presumably, enough hush money to keep her in some distant part of the world, and secondly, the fact that the Smiths would never erect a monument or even visit the grave of the man whose vast fortune they enjoyed.

As the Smiths distinctly treated themselves as in the light of a guilty couple, the public feeling was not blamable for their resentment. They lived wealthily and unhappily ever afterwards within the gloomy walls of the Palladian super-villa which they had inherited. In due time they died, childless and intestate. They had been forgotten long before their deaths and would have been totally forgotten afterwards, had it not been for the celebrated legislation which arose over Sir Athelstone's fortune. By his Will it reverted to the Middle Midlands Hospital, provided that all his wishes were fulfilled. When it was recalled that one of his requests had been that his dissected

body should be interred on the premises of the Institution he had endowed, the representatives of Edward Penguin brought an action on the grounds that the remains, or some of them, had been buried in the churchyard near his house.

The Governors of the Hospital were seriously alarmed, and after taking legal advice applied to the Home Office for permission to disinter and recover the remains of their founder, according to his last Will and Testament. In this way they felt that they could make themselves legally secure. Permission was granted, and a shrine was prepared in the very walls of the Hospital as an adequate resting-place. Arrangements for a form of ceremony of deposition had been made, when the Governors of the hospital and their legal advisers were considerably disconcerted by one of those utterly unexpected surprises which thrill and mystify the English public. The coffin of Sir Athelstone Penguin was brought to the surface in the presence of legal, medical, and police authorities. It contained the mummified and scarcely decayed body of a middle-aged woman. After so short a lapse of time there could be no doubt that it was the right grave. Although no monument had been erected, the vault had preserved a number of immortelles in their glass cases. On one the printed card of inscription was still legible. It read :

SIR ATHELSTONE PENGUIN, BART.
FROM HIS DEVOTED NURSE.

TELLING

By Elizabeth Bowen

Terry looked up; Josephine lay still. He felt shy, embarrassed all at once at the idea of anyone coming here. His brain was ticking like a watch: he looked up warily.

But there was nobody. Outside the high cold walls, beyond the ragged arch of the chapel, delphiniums crowded in sunshine—straining with brightness, burning each other up—bars of colour that, while one watched them, seemed to turn round slowly. But there was nobody there.

The chapel was a ruin, roofed by daylight, floored with lawn. In a corner the gardener had tipped out a heap of cut grass from the lawn-mower. The daisy-heads wilted, the cut grass smelt stuffy and sweet. Everywhere, cigarette ends, scattered last night by the couples who'd come here to kiss. First the dance, thought Terry, then this: the servants will never get straight. The cigarette ends would lie here for days, till after the rain, and go brown and rotten.

Then he noticed a charred cigarette stump in Josephine's hair. The short wavy ends of her hair fell back—still in lines of perfection—from temples and ears; by her left ear the charred stump showed through. For that, he thought, she would never forgive him; fastidiousness was her sensibility, always tormented. ("If you must know," she had said, "well, you've got dirty nails, haven't you? Look.") He bent down and picked the cigarette end out of her hair; the fine ends fluttered under

his breath. As he threw it away, he noticed his nails were still dirty. His hands were stained now—naturally—but his nails must have been dirty before. Had she noticed again?

But had she, perhaps, for a moment been proud of him? Had she had just a glimpse of the something he'd told her about? He wanted to ask her: "What do you feel now? Do you believe in me?" He felt sure of himself, certain, justified. For nobody else would have done this to Josephine.

Himself they had all—always—deprecated. He felt a shrug in this attitude, a thinly disguised kind of hopelessness. "Oh, *Terry*, . . ." they'd say, and break off. He was no good: he couldn't even put up a tennis-net. He never could see properly (whisky helped that at first, then it didn't), his hands wouldn't serve him, things he wanted them to hold slipped away from them. He was no good; the younger ones laughed at him till they, like their brothers and sisters, grew up and were schooled into bitter kindliness. Again and again he'd been sent back to them all (and repetition never blunted the bleak edge of these home-comings) from school, from Cambridge, now—a month ago—from Ceylon. "The bad penny!" he would remark, very jocular. "If I could just think things out," he had tried to explain to his father, "I know I could do *something*." And once he had said to Josephine: "I know there is Something I could do."

"And they will know now," he said, looking round (for the strange new pleasure of clearly and sharply seeing) from Josephine's face to her stained breast (her heavy blue beads slipped sideways over her shoulder and coiled on the grass—touched, surrounded now by the unhesitant trickle); from her breast up the walls to their top, the top crumbling, the tufts of valerian trembling against the sky. It was as though the dark-paned window through which he had so long looked out had swung open suddenly. He saw (clear as the walls and the sky) Right and Wrong,

the old childish fixities. I have done right, he thought (but his brain was still ticking). *She ought not to live* with this flaw in her. Josephine ought not to live, had to die.

All night he had thought this out, walking alone in the shrubberies, helped by the dance-music, dodging the others. His mind had been kindled, like a dull coal suddenly blazing. He was not angry; he kept saying: "I must not be angry, I must be just." He was in a blaze (it seemed to himself) of justice. The couples who came face to face with him down the paths started away. Someone spoke of a minor prophet, someone breathed "Caliban." . . . He kept saying: "That flaw right through her. She damages truth. She kills souls; she's killed mine." So he had come to see, before morning, his purpose as God's purpose.

She had laughed, you see. She had been pretending. There was a tender and lovely thing he kept hidden, a spark in him; she had touched it and made it the whole of him, made him a man. She had said: "Yes, *I* believe, Terry. I understand." That had been everything. He had thrown off the old dull armour. . . . Then she had laughed.

Then he had understood what other men meant when they spoke of her. He had seen at once what he was meant to do. "This is for me," he said. "No one but I can do it."

All night he walked alone in the garden. Then he watched the french windows and when they were open again stepped in quickly and took down the African knife from the dining-room wall. He had always wanted that African knife. Then he had gone upstairs (remembering, on the way, all those meetings with Josephine, shaving, tying of ties), shaved, changed into flannels, put the knife into his blazer pocket (it was too long, more than an inch of the blade came out through the inside lining) and sat on his window-sill, watching sunlight brighten and broaden

from a yellow agitation behind the trees into swathes of colour across the lawn. He did not think; his mind was like somebody singing, somebody able to sing.

And, later, it had all been arranged for him. He fell into, had his part in, some kind of design. Josephine had come down in her pleated white dress (when she turned the pleats whirled). He had said, "Come out!" and she gave that light distant look, still with a laugh at the back of it, and said, "Oh—right-o, little Terry." And she had walked down the garden ahead of him, past the delphiniums into the chapel. Here, to make justice perfect, he had asked once more: "*Do* you believe in me?" She had laughed again.

She lay now with her feet and body in sunshine (the sun was just high enough), her arms flung out wide at him, desperately, generously: her head rolling sideways in shadow on the enclosed, silky grass. On her face was a dazzled look (eyes half closed, lips drawn back), an expression almost of diffidence. Her blood quietly soaked through the grass, sinking through to the roots of it.

He crouched a moment and, touching her eyelids—still warm—tried to shut her eyes. But he didn't know how. Then he got up and wiped the blade of the African knife with a handful of grass, then scattered the handful away. All the time he was listening; he felt shy, embarrassed at the thought of anyone finding him here. And his brain, like a watch, was still ticking.

On his way to the house he stooped down and dipped his hands in the garden tank. Someone might scream; he felt embarrassed at the thought of somebody screaming. The red curled away through the water and melted.

He stepped in at the morning-room window. The blinds were half down—he stooped his head to avoid them—and the room was in dark-yellow shadow. (He had waited here for them all to come in, that afternoon he arrived back from Ceylon.) The smell of pinks came in,

and two or three blue-bottles bumbled and bounced on the ceiling. His sister Catherine sat with her back to him, playing the piano. (He had heard her as he came up the path.) He looked at her pink pointed elbows—she was playing a waltz and the music ran through them in jerky ripples.

" Hullo, Catherine," he said, and listened in admiration. So his new voice sounded like this !

" Hullo, Terry." She went on playing, worrying at the waltz. She had an anxious, methodical mind, but loved gossip. He thought : Here is a bit of gossip for you—Josephine's down in the chapel, covered with blood. Her dress is spoilt, but I think her blue beads are all right. I should go and see.

" I say, Catherine——"

" Oh, Terry, they're putting the furniture back in the drawing-room. I wish you'd go and help. It's getting those big sofas through the door . . . and the cabinets." She laughed : " I'm just putting the music away," and went on playing.

He thought : I don't suppose she'll be able to marry now. No one will marry her. He said : " Do you know where Josephine is ? "

" No, I haven't "—rum-tum-tum, rum-tum-*tum*—" the slightest idea. Go on, Terry."

He thought : She never liked Josephine. He went away.

He stood in the door of the drawing-room. His brothers and Beatrice were punting the big arm-chairs, chintz-skirted, over the waxy floor. They all felt him there : for as long as possible didn't notice him. Charles —fifteen, with his pink scrubbed ears—considered a moment, shoving against the cabinet, thought it was rather a shame, turned with an honest, kindly look of distaste, said, " Come on, Terry." He can't go back to school now, thought Terry, can't go anywhere, really : wonder what they'll do with him—send him out to the Colonies ?

Charles had perfect manners: square, bluff, perfect. He never thought about anybody, never felt anybody—just classified them. Josephine was "a girl staying in the house," "a friend of my sisters." He would think at once (in a moment when Terry had told him), "A girl staying in the house . . . it's . . . well, I mean, if it hadn't been *a girl staying in the house* . . ."

Terry went over to him; they pushed the cabinet. But Terry pushed too hard, crooked; the further corner grated against the wall. "Oh, I say, we've scratched the paint," said Charles. And indeed they had; on the wall was a grey scar. Charles went scarlet: he hated things to be done badly. It was nice of him to say: "*We've* scratched the paint." Would he say later: "We've killed Josephine"?

"I think perhaps you'd better help with the sofas," said Charles civilly.

"You should have seen the blood on my hands just now," said Terry.

"Bad luck!" Charles said quickly and went away.

Beatrice, Josephine's friend, stood with her elbows on the mantelpiece looking at herself in the glass above. Last night a man had kissed her down in the chapel (Terry had watched them). This must seem to Beatrice to be written all over her face—what else could she be looking at? Her eyes in the looking-glass were dark, beseeching. As she saw Terry come up behind her she frowned angrily and turned away.

"I say, Beatrice, do you know what happened down in the chapel?"

"Does it interest you?" She stooped quickly and pulled down the sofa loose-cover where it had "runkled" up, as though the sofa legs were indecent.

"Beatrice, what would you do if I'd killed somebody?"

"Laugh," said she, wearily.

"If I'd killed a woman?"

"Laugh harder. Do you know any women?"

She was a lovely thing, really: he'd ruined her, he supposed. He was all in a panic. "Beatrice, swear you won't go down to the chapel." Because she might, well —of course she'd go down: as soon as she was alone and they didn't notice she'd go creeping down to the chapel. It had been *that* kind of kiss.

"Oh, be quiet about that old chapel!" Already he'd spoilt last night for her. How she hated him! He looked round for John. John had gone away.

On the hall table were two letters, come by the second post, waiting for Josephine. No one, he thought, ought to read them—he must protect Josephine; he took them up and slipped them into his pocket.

"I say," called John from the stairs, "what are you doing with those letters?" John didn't mean to be sharp but they had taken each other unawares. They none of them wanted Terry to *feel* how his movements were sneaking movements; when they met him creeping about by himself they would either ignore him or say: "Where are *you* off to?" jocosely and loudly, to hide the fact of their knowing he didn't know. John was Terry's elder brother, but hated to sound like one. But he couldn't help knowing those letters were for Josephine, and Josephine was "staying in the house."

"I'm taking them for Josephine."

"Know where she is?"

"Yes, in the chapel. . . . I killed her there."

But John—hating this business with Terry—had turned away. Terry followed him upstairs, repeating: "I killed her there, John. . . . John, I've killed Josephine in the chapel." John hurried ahead, not listening, not turning round. "Oh yes," he called over his shoulder. "Right you are, take them along." He disappeared into the smoking-room, banging the door. It had been John's idea that, from the day after Terry's return from Ceylon, the sideboard cupboard in the dining-room should be kept locked up. But he'd never said anything; oh no.

What interest could the sideboard cupboard have for a brother of his? he pretended to think.

Oh yes, thought Terry, you're a fine man with a muscular back, but you couldn't have done what I've done. There had, after all, been Something in Terry. He *was* abler than John (they'd soon know). John had never kissed Josephine.

Terry sat down on the stairs saying: "Josephine, Josephine!" He sat there gripping a baluster, shaking with exaltation.

The study door-panels had always looked solemn; they bulged with solemnity. Terry had to get past to his father; he chose the top left-hand panel to tap on. The patient voice said: "Come in!"

Here and now, thought Terry. He had a great audience; he looked at the books round the dark walls and thought of all those thinkers. His father jerked up a contracted, strained look at him. Terry felt that hacking with his news into this silence was like hacking into a great, grave chest. The desk was a havoc of papers.

"What exactly do you want?" said his father, rubbing the edge of the desk.

Terry stood there silently: everything ebbed. "I want," he said at last, "to talk about my future."

His father sighed and slid a hand forward, rumpling the papers. "I suppose, Terry," he said as gently as possible, "you really *have* got a future?" Then he reproached himself. "Well, sit down a minute. . . . I'll just . . ."

Terry sat down. The clock on the mantelpiece echoed the ticking in his brain. He waited.

"Yes?" said his father.

"Well, there must be some kind of future for me, mustn't there?"

"Oh, certainly. . . ."

"Look here, father, I have something to show you. That African knife——"

"What about it?"

"That African knife. It's here. I've got it to show you."

"What about it?"

"Wait just a minute." He put a hand into either pocket: his father waited.

"It *was* here—I did have it. I brought it to show you. I must have it somewhere—that African knife."

But it wasn't there, he hadn't got it; he had lost it; left it, dropped it—on the grass, by the tank, anywhere. He remembered wiping it. . . . Then?

Now his support was all gone; he was terrified now; he wept.

"I've lost it," he quavered, "I've lost it."

"What do you mean?" said his father, sitting blankly there like a tombstone, with his white, square face. "What are you trying to tell me?"

"Nothing," said Terry, weeping and shaking. "Nothing, nothing, nothing."

FOOTPRINTS IN THE JUNGLE

By W. Somerset Maugham.

There is no place in Malaya that has more charm than Tanah Merah. It lies on the sea, and the sandy shore is fringed with casuarinas. The Government offices are still in the old red *Raad Huis* that the Dutch built when they owned the land, and on the hill stand the grey ruins of the fort by means of which the Portuguese maintained their hold over the unruly natives. Tanah Merah has a history and in the vast labyrinthine houses of the Chinese merchants, backing on the sea so that in the cool of the evening they may sit in their open loggias and enjoy the salt breeze, families dwell that have been settled in the country for three centuries. Many have forgotten their native language and hold intercourse with one another in Malay and pidgin-English. The imagination lingers here gratefully, for in the Federated Malay States the only past is within the memory for the most part of the fathers of living men.

Tanah Merah was for long the busiest mart of the Middle East, and its harbour was crowded with shipping when the clipper and the junk still sailed the China seas. But now it is dead. It has the sad and romantic charm of all places that have once been of importance and live now on the recollection of a vanished grandeur. It is a sleepy little town, and strangers that come to it, losing the energy brought with them, insensibly drop into its easy and lethargic ways. Successive rubber booms bring it no prosperity, and the ensuing slumps hasten its decay.

The European quarter is strangely silent. It is trim and neat and clean. The houses of the white men—Government servants and agents of companies—stand round an immense *padang*, agreeable little bungalows shaded by great cassias, and the *padang* is vast and green and well-cared-for, like the lawns of a cathedral close; and indeed there is in the aspect of this corner of Tanah Merah something quiet and delicately secluded that reminds you of the precincts of Canterbury.

The club faces the sea; it is a spacious but shabby building; it has an air of neglect, and when you enter you feel that you intrude. It gives you the impression that it is closed, really, for alterations and repairs, and that you have taken indiscreet advantage of an open door to go where you are not wanted. In the morning you may find there a couple of planters who have come in from their estates on business and are drinking a gin-sling before starting back again; and latish in the afternoon a lady or two may perhaps be seen looking with a furtive air through old numbers of the *Illustrated London News*. At nightfall a few men saunter along and sit about the billiard-room watching the play and drinking *sukus*, and perhaps four may be found to make up a rubber of bridge. It is only on Wednesdays that a shadow of gaiety may be seen, for then the gramophone is set going in the large room upstairs and people come in from the surrounding country to dance. There are sometimes no less than a dozen couples then, and it is even possible to make up two tables of bridge.

It was on one of these occasions that I met the Cartwrights. I was staying with a man called Gaze, who was head of the police, and he came into the billiard-room, where I was sitting, and asked me if I would make up a four. The Cartwrights were planters and they came in to Tanah Merah on Wednesdays because it gave their girl a chance of getting a few dances. They were very nice people, said Gaze, quiet and unobtrusive, and played a very pleasant game of bridge. I followed Gaze into the

card-room and was introduced to the Cartwrights. They were already seated at a table and Mrs. Cartwright was shuffling the cards. It inspired me with confidence to see the competent way in which she did it. She took half the pack in each hand—and her hands were large and strong—deftly inserted the corners of one half under the corners of the other, and with a click and a neat bold gesture cascaded them together.

It had all the effect of a conjuring trick. The card-player knows that it can be done perfectly only after incessant practice. He can be fairly sure that anyone who can so shuffle a pack of cards loves cards for their own sake.

"Do you mind if my husband and I play together?" asked Mrs. Cartwright. "It's no fun for us to win one another's money."

"Of course not."

We cut for deal and Gaze and I sat down.

Mrs. Cartwright drew an ace, and while she dealt, quickly and neatly, she chatted with Gaze of local affairs, but I was aware that she appraised me. She had shrewd eyes and they observed you with keenness, but also with good-humour.

She was a woman somewhere in the fifties (though in the East, where people age quickly, it is difficult to tell their ages), with white hair very untidily arranged, and a constant gesture with her was an impatient movement of the hand to push back a long wisp of hair that kept falling over her forehead. You wondered why she did not, by the use of a hairpin or two, save herself so much trouble. Her blue eyes were large, but pale and a little tired; her face was lined and sallow; I think it was her mouth that gave it the expression which I felt was characteristic of caustic but tolerant irony. You saw that here was a woman who knew her mind and was never afraid to speak it. She was a chatty player (which some people object to strongly, but which does not disconcert

me, for I do not see why you should behave at the card-table as though you were at a memorial service) and it was soon apparent that she had an agreeable knack of badinage. It was pleasantly acid, but it was amusing enough to be offensive only to a fool. If now and then she uttered a remark so sarcastic that you wanted all your sense of humour to see the fun in it, you could not but quickly see that she was willing to take as much as she gave. Her large, thin mouth broke into a dry smile and her eyes shone brightly when by a lucky chance you brought off a repartee that turned the laugh against her.

I thought her a very pleasant person. I liked her frankness. I liked her quick wit. I liked her plain face. I never met a woman who obviously cared so little how she looked. It was not only her head that was untidy, everything about her was slovenly : she wore a high-necked silk blouse, but for coolness she had unbuttoned the top buttons and showed a gaunt and withered neck ; the blouse was crumpled and none too clean, for she smoked innumerable cigarettes and covered herself with ash. When she got up for a moment to speak to somebody I saw that her blue skirt was rather ragged at the hem and badly needed a brush, and she wore heavy, low-heeled boots. But none of this mattered. Everything she wore was perfectly in character.

And it was a pleasure to play bridge with her. She played very quickly, without hesitation, and she had not only knowledge but flair. Of course she knew Gaze's game, but I was a stranger and she soon took my measure. The teamwork between her husband and herself was admirable ; he was sound and cautious, but, knowing his game exactly, she was able to be bold with assurance and brilliant with safety. Gaze was a player who founded a foolish optimism on the hope that his opponents would not have the sense to take advantage of his errors, and the pair of us were no match for the Cartwrights. We lost one

rubber after another, and there was nothing to do but smile and look as if we liked it.

"I don't know what's the matter with the cards," said Gaze at last, plaintively. "Even when we have every card in the pack we go down."

"It can't be anything to do with your play," answered Mrs. Cartwright, looking him full in the face with those pale blue eyes of hers; "it must be bad luck, pure and simple. Now if you hadn't had your hearts mixed up with your diamonds in that last hand you'd have saved the game."

Gaze began to explain at length how the misfortune, which had cost us dear, occurred, but Mrs. Cartwright, with a deft flick of the hand, spread out the cards in a great circle so that we should cut for deal. Cartwright looked at his watch.

"This will have to be the last, my dear," he said.

"Oh, will it?" She glanced at her watch and then called to a young man who was passing through the room. "Oh, Mr. Bullen, if you're going upstairs tell Olive that we shall be going in a few minutes." She turned to me. "It takes us the best part of an hour to get back to the estate, and poor Theo has to be up at an unearthly hour in the morning."

"Oh, well, we only come in once a week," said Cartwright, "and it's the one chance Olive gets of being gay and abandoned."

I thought Cartwright looked tired and old. He was a man of middle height, with a bald, shiny head, a stubbly grey moustache, and gold-rimmed spectacles. He wore white ducks and a black and white tie. He was rather neat and you could see he took much more pains with his clothes than his untidy wife. He talked little, but it was plain that he enjoyed his wife's caustic humour and sometimes he made quite a neat retort. They were evidently very good friends. On his side there was admiration of her oddness and eccentric personality, and on hers

gratitude for his appreciation and confidence. It was pleasing to see so solid and tolerant an affection between two people who were almost elderly and must have lived together for so many years.

It took but two hands to finish the rubber and we had just ordered a final gin and bitters when Olive came down.

"Do you really want to go already, mumsey?" she asked.

Mrs. Cartwright looked at her daughter with fond eyes.

"Yes, darling. It's nearly half-past eight. It'll be ten before we get our dinner."

"Damn our dinner," said Olive gaily.

"Let her have one more dance before we go," suggested Cartwright.

"Not one. You must have a good night's rest."

Cartwright looked at Olive with a smile.

"If your mother has made up her mind, my dear, we may just as well give in without any fuss."

"She's a determined woman," said Olive, lovingly stroking her mother's wrinkled cheek.

Mrs. Cartwright patted her daughter's hand, and kissed it.

Olive was not very pretty, but she looked extremely nice. She was nineteen or twenty, I suppose, and she had still the plumpness of her age; she would be more attractive when she had fined down a little. She had none of the determination that gave her mother's face so much character, but resembled her father; she had his dark eyes and slightly aquiline nose, and his look of rather weak good-nature. It was plain that she was strong and healthy, her cheeks were red and her eyes were bright, she had a vitality that he had long lost. She seemed to be the perfectly normal English girl with high spirits, a great desire to enjoy herself, and an excellent temper.

When we separated, Gaze and I set out to walk to his house.

"What did you think of the Cartwrights?" he asked me.

"I liked them. They seemed to me very nice people. They must be a great asset in a place like this."

"I wish they came oftener. They live a very quiet life."

"It must be dull for the girl. The father and mother seem very well satisfied with one another's company."

"Yes, it's been a great success."

"Olive is the image of her father, isn't she?"

Gaze gave me a sidelong glance.

"Cartwright isn't her father. Mrs. Cartwright was a widow when he married her, and Olive was born five months after her husband's death."

"Oh!"

I drew out the sound in order to put in it all I could of surprise, interest, curiosity, and eagerness to know more. But Gaze said nothing and we walked the rest of the way in silence. The boy was waiting at the door as we entered the house, and after a last gin *pahit* we sat down to dinner.

At first Gaze was inclined to be talkative. Owing to the restriction of the output of rubber there had sprung up a considerable activity among the smugglers, and it was part of his duty to circumvent their knavishness. Two junks had been captured that day and he was rubbing his hands over his success. The go-downs were full of confiscated rubber, and in a little while it was going to be solemnly burnt. But presently he fell into silence and we finished without a word. The boys brought in coffee and brandy and we lit our cheroots. Gaze leaned back in his chair. He looked at me reflectively and then looked at his brandy. The boys had left the room and we were alone.

"I've known Mrs. Cartwright for over twenty years," he said slowly. "She wasn't a bad-looking woman in those days. Always untidy, but when she was young it

didn't seem to matter so much. It was rather attractive. She was married to a man called Bronson—Reggie Bronson. He was a planter. He was manager of an estate up in Selantan and I was stationed at Alor Lipis. It was a much smaller place than it is now, I don't suppose there were more than twenty people in the whole community, but they had a jolly little club and we used to have a very good time. I remember the first time I met Mrs. Bronson as though it was yesterday.

"There were no cars in those days and she and Bronson had ridden in on their bicycles. Of course then she didn't look so determined as she looks now. She was much thinner, she had a nice colour and her eyes seemed larger. They were very pretty blue eyes, you know, and she had a lot of dark hair. If she'd only taken more trouble with herself she'd have been rather stunning. As it was she was the best-looking woman there."

I tried to construct in my mind a picture of what Mrs. Cartwright—Mrs. Bronson as she was then—looked like from what she was now, and from Gaze's not very descriptive remarks. In the solid woman, with her well-covered bones, who sat rather heavily at the bridge table, I tried to see a slight young thing with buoyant movements and graceful, easy gestures. Her chin now was very square and her nose decided, but the roundness of youth must have hidden this: her unlined skin was pink and white, and I could well imagine that the careless way in which she dressed her brown abundant hair gave her a peculiar charm. At that period she must have worn a long skirt, a tight waist and a picture hat. Or did women in Malaya still wear the topees that you see in old numbers of the illustrated papers?

"I hadn't seen her for—oh, nearly twenty years," Gaze went on. "I knew she was living somewhere in the F.M.S., but it was a surprise, when I took this job and came here to run across her in the club just as I had up in Selantan so many years before. Of course she's an

elderly woman now and she's changed out of all recognition. It was rather a shock to see her with a grown-up daughter; it made me realise how the time had passed; I was a young fellow when I met her last, and now, by jingo! I'm due to retire on the age-limit in two or three years. Bit thick, isn't it?"

Gaze, a rueful grin on his ugly face, looked at me with faint indignation, as though I could help the hurrying march of the years as they trod upon one another's heels.

"I'm no chicken myself," I replied.

"You haven't lived out in the East all your life. It ages one before one's time. One's an elderly man at fifty, and at fifty-five one's good for nothing but the scrap-heap."

But I did not want Gaze to wander off into a disquisition on old age.

"Did you recognise Mrs. Cartwright when you saw her again?" I asked.

"Well, I did and I didn't. At the first glance I thought she reminded me of someone I knew. It didn't occur to me that I hadn't seen her for twenty years, and she'd changed. I thought it was someone I'd met on board ship when I was going on leave and had known only by sight. But the moment she spoke to me I remembered at once. I remembered the dry twinkle in her eyes and the crisp sound of her voice. There was something in her voice that seemed to mean: You're a bit of a damned fool, my lad, but you're not a bad sort, and upon my soul I rather like you."

"That's a good deal to read into the sound of a voice," I smiled.

"She came up to me in the club and shook hands with me. 'How do you do, Major Gaze? Do you remember me?' she said.

"'Of course I do.'

"'A lot of water has passed under the bridge since

we met last. We're none of us as young as we were. Have you seen Theo?'

"For a moment I couldn't think who she meant. I suppose I looked rather stupid, because she gave a little smile, that ironical, quizzing smile that now I recalled so well, and explained.

"'I married Theo, you know. It seemed the best thing to do. I was lonely and he wanted it.'

"'I heard you married him,' I said. 'I hope you've been very happy.'

"'Oh, very. Theo's a perfect duck. He'll be here in a minute. He'll be so glad to see you.'

"I wondered. I should have thought I was the last person Theo would wish to see. I shouldn't have thought she would wish it very much either. But women are funny."

"Why shouldn't she wish to see you?" I asked.

"I'm coming to that later," said Gaze. "Then Theo turned up. I don't know why I called him Theo; I never called him anything but Cartwright; I never thought of him as anything but Cartwright. Theo was a shock. You know what he looks like now; I remembered him as a curly-headed youngster, very fresh and clean-looking; he was always neat and dapper. He had a good figure, and he held himself easily, like a man who's used to taking a lot of exercise. Now I come to think of it, he wasn't bad looking—not in a big, massive way, but graceful, you know, and lithe. When I saw this bowed, cadaverous, bald-headed old fellow with spectacles I could hardly believe my eyes. I shouldn't have known him from Adam. He seemed pleased to see me; at least, interested; he wasn't effusive, but he'd always been on the quiet side, and I didn't expect him to be.

"'Are you surprised to find us here?' he asked me.

"'Well, I hadn't the faintest notion where you were.'

"'We've kept track of your movements more or less. We've seen your name in the paper every now and then.

You must come out one day and have a look at our place. We've been settled there a good many years, and I suppose we shall stay there till we go home for good. Have you ever been back to Alor Lipis?'

"'No, I haven't,' I said.

"'It was a nice little place. I am told it's grown. I've never been back.'

"'It hasn't got the pleasantest recollections for us,' said Mrs. Cartwright.

"I asked them if they would have a drink, and we called the boy. I daresay you noticed that Mrs. Cartwright likes her liquor; I don't mean that she gets tight or anything like that, but she drinks her stingah like a man. I couldn't help looking at them with a certain amount of curiosity. They seemed perfectly happy. I gathered that they hadn't done at all badly, and I found out later that they were quite well off. They had a very nice car, and when they went on leave they denied themselves nothing. They were on the best of terms with one another. You know how jolly it is to see two people who've been married a great many years obviously better pleased with their own company than anyone else's. Their marriage had evidently been a great success. And they were both of them devoted to Olive and very proud of her, Theo especially."

"Although she was only his step-daughter?" I said.

"Although she was only his step-daughter," answered Gaze. "You'd think that she would have taken his name, but she hadn't. She called him daddy, of course—he was the only father she had ever known—but she signed her letters Olive Bronson."

"What was Bronson like, by the way?"

"Bronson? He was a great big fellow, very hearty, with a loud voice and a bellowing laugh; beefy, you know, and a fine athlete. There was not very much to him, but he was as straight as a die. He had a red face and red hair. Now I come to think of it, I remember that I

never saw a man sweat as much as he did. Water just poured off him, and when he played tennis he always used to take a towel on the court with him."

"It doesn't sound very attractive."

"He was a handsome chap. He was always fit. He was keen on that. He hadn't much to talk about but rubber and games, tennis, you know, and golf and shooting; and I don't suppose he read a book from year's end to year's end. He was the typical public-school boy. He was about thirty-five when I first knew him, but he had the mind of a boy of eighteen. You know how many fellows when they come out East seem to stop growing."

I did indeed. One of the most disconcerting things to the traveller is to see stout, middle-aged gentlemen, with bald heads, speaking and acting as though they were school-boys. It is as though from the time they first pass through the Suez Canal no idea had ever entered their heads, and they continue, though married and the fathers of children, and though they may be at the head of large businesses, to look upon life from the standpoint of the sixth form.

"But he was no fool," Gaze went on. "He knew his work from A to Z. His estate was one of the best managed in the country, and he knew how to handle his labour. He was a damned good sort, and if he did get on your nerves a little, you couldn't help liking him. He was generous with his money, and always ready to do anybody a good turn. That's how Cartwright happened to turn up in the first instance."

"Did the Bronsons get on well together?"

"Oh yes, I think so. I'm sure they did. He was very good-natured, and she was very jolly and gay in those days. She was very outspoken, you know. She can be very funny when she likes even now, but there's generally a sting lurking in the joke; when she was a young woman and married to Bronson it was just pure fun. She had high spirits and liked having a good time.

She never cared a damn what she said, but it went with her type, if you understand what I mean; there was something so open and frank and careless about her that you didn't care what she said to you. They seemed very happy.

"Their estate was about five miles from Alor Lipis, and they used to ride in most evenings about five. Of course it was a very small community, and men were in the majority. There were only about six women. The Bronsons were a godsend. They bucked things up the moment they arrived. We used to have very jolly times in that little club. I've often thought of them since, and I don't know that on the whole I've ever enjoyed myself more than I did when I was stationed there. Between six and eight-thirty the club at Alor Lipis twenty years ago was about as lively a place as you could find between Aden and Yokohama.

"One day Mrs. Bronson told us that they were expecting a friend to stay with them, and a few days later they brought Cartwright along. It appeared that he was an old friend of Bronson's. They'd been at school together—Marlborough, or some place like that—and they'd first come out East on the same ship. Rubber was not very good at that time, and a lot of fellows had lost their jobs. Cartwright was one of them. He'd been out of work for the greater part of a year, and he hadn't anything to fall back on. In those days planters were even worse paid than they are now, and a man has to be very lucky to put by something for a rainy day. Cartwright had gone to Singapore. They all go there when there's a slump, you know. It's awful then. I've seen it. I've known of planters sleeping in the street because they hadn't the price of a night's lodging. I've known them stop strangers outside the 'Europe' and ask for a dollar to get a meal; and I think Cartwright had had a pretty rotten time.

"At last he wrote to Bronson and asked him if he

couldn't do something for him. Bronson asked him to come and stay till things got better. At least it would be free board and lodging, and Cartwright jumped at the chance, but Bronson had to send him the money to pay his railway fare. When Cartwright arrived at Alor Lipis he hadn't ten cents in his pocket. Bronson had a little money of his own—two or three hundred a year, I think—and though his salary had been cut, he had kept his job, so that he was better off than most planters. When Cartwright came, Mrs. Bronson told him that he was to look upon the place as his home, and stay as long as he liked."

"It was very nice of her, wasn't it?" I remarked.

"Very."

Gaze lit himself another cheroot and filled his glass. It was very still, and but for the occasional croak of the *chik-chak* the silence was intense. We seemed to be alone in the tropical night, and heaven only knows how far from the habitations of men. Gaze did not speak for so long that at last I was forced to say something.

"What sort of a man was Cartwright at that time?" I asked. "Younger, of course, and you told me rather nice-looking; but in himself?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I never paid much attention to him. He was pleasant and unassuming. He's very quiet now, as I daresay you noticed. Well, he wasn't exactly lively then, but he was perfectly inoffensive. He was fond of reading, and he played the piano rather nicely.

"You never minded having him about. He was never in the way, but you never bothered very much about him. He danced well, and the women rather liked that, but he also played billiards quite decently, and he wasn't bad at tennis.

"He fell into our little groove very naturally. I wouldn't say that he ever became wildly popular, but everybody liked him. Of course, we were sorry for him,

as one is for a man who's down and out, but there was nothing we could do, and—well, we just accepted him, and then forgot that he hadn't always been there. He used to come in with the Bronsons every evening and pay for his drinks like every one else. I suppose Bronson had lent a bit of money for current expenses, and he was always very civil. I'm rather vague about him, because really he didn't make any particular impression on me. In the East one meets such a lot of people, and he seemed very much like anybody else.

"He did everything he could to get something to do, but he had no luck. The fact is, there were no jobs going, and sometimes he seemed rather depressed about it. He was with the Bronsons for over a year. I remember his saying to me once:

"'After all, I can't live with them for ever. They've been most awfully good to me, but there are limits.'

"'I should think the Bronsons would be very glad to have you,' I said. 'It's not very gay on a rubber estate, and as far as your food and drink go, it must make very little difference if you're there or not.'"

Gaze stopped once more and looked at me with a sort of hesitation.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"I'm afraid I'm telling you this story very badly," he said. "I seem to be just rambling on. I'm not a damned novelist, I'm a policeman, and I'm just telling you the facts as I saw them at the time; and from my point of view all the circumstances are important. It's important, I mean, to realise what sort of people they were."

"Of course. Fire away."

"I remember someone—a woman, I think it was the doctor's wife—asking Mrs. Bronson if she didn't get tired sometimes of having a stranger in the house. You know, in places like Alor Lipis there isn't very much to talk about, and if you didn't talk about your neighbours there'd be nothing to talk about at all.

" ' Oh no,' she said, ' Theo's no trouble.' She turned to her husband, who was sitting there mopping his face. ' We like having him, don't we ? '

" ' He's all right,' said Bronson.

" ' What does he do with himself all day long ? '

" ' Oh, I don't know,' said Mrs. Bronson. ' He walks round the estate with Reggie sometimes, and he shoots a little. He talks to me.'

" ' He's always glad to make himself useful,' said Bronson. ' The other day when I had a go of fever, he took over my work, and I just lay in bed and had a good time.' "

" Hadn't the Bronsons any children ? " I asked.

" No," Gaze answered. " I don't know why ; they could well have afforded it."

Gaze leant back in his chair. He took off his glasses and wiped them. They were very strong, and hideously distorted his eyes. Without them he wasn't so homely. The *chik-chak* on the ceiling gave its strangely human cry. It was like the cackle of an idiot child.

" Bronson was killed," said Gaze suddenly.

" Killed ? "

" Yes, murdered. I shall never forget that night. We'd been playing tennis—Mrs. Bronson and the doctor's wife, Theo Cartwright, and I ; and then we played bridge. Cartwright had been off his game, and when we sat down at the bridge table Mrs. Bronson said to him : ' Well, Theo, if you play bridge as rottenly as you played tennis, we shall lose our shirts.'

" We'd just had a drink, but she called the boy and ordered another round.

" ' Put that down your throat,' she said to him, ' and don't call without top honours and an outside trick.'

" Bronson hadn't turned up. He'd gone in to Kabulong to get the money to pay his coolies their wages, and was to come along to the club when he got back. The Bronsons' estate was nearer Alor Lipis than it was

to Kabulong, but Kabulong was a more important place commercially, and Bronson banked there.

" ' Reggie can cut in when he turns up,' said Mrs. Bronson.

" ' He's late, isn't he ? ' said the doctor's wife.

" ' Very. He said he wouldn't get back in time for tennis, but would be here for a rubber. I have a suspicion that he went to the club at Kabulong instead of coming straight home, and is having drinks, the ruffian.'

" ' Oh, well, he can put away a good many without their having much effect on him,' I laughed.

" ' He's getting fat, you know. He'll have to be careful.'

" We sat by ourselves in the card-room, and we could hear the crowd in the billiard-room talking and laughing. They were all on the merry side. It was getting on to Christmas Day, and we were all letting ourselves go a little. There was going to be a dance on Christmas Eve.

" I remembered afterwards that when we sat down the doctor's wife asked Mrs. Bronson if she wasn't tired.

" ' Not a bit,' she said. ' Why should I be ? '

" I didn't know why she flushed.

" ' I was afraid the tennis might have been too much for you,' said the doctor's wife.

" ' Oh no,' answered Mrs. Bronson, a trifle abruptly, I thought, as though she didn't want to discuss the matter.

" I did not know what they meant, and indeed it was not till later that I remembered the incident.

" We played three or four rubbers, and still Bronson did not turn up.

" ' I wonder what's happened to him,' said his wife. ' I can't think why he should be so late.'

" Cartwright was always silent, but this evening he had hardly opened his mouth. I thought he was tired, and asked him what he'd been doing.

" ' Nothing very much,' he said. ' I went out after tiffin to shoot pigeon.'

" ' Did you have any luck ? ' I asked.

" ' Oh, I got half a dozen. They were very shy.'

" But now he said : ' If Reggie got back late, I daresay he thought it wasn't worth while to come here. I expect he's had a bath, and when we get in we shall find him asleep in his chair.'

" ' It's a good long ride from Kabulong,' said the doctor's wife.

" ' He doesn't take the road, you know,' Mrs. Bronson explained. ' He takes the short cut through the jungle.'

" ' Can he get along on his bicycle ? ' I asked.

" ' Oh yes ; it's a very good track. It saves about a couple of miles.'

" We had just started another rubber when the bar-boy came in and said that there was a police-sergeant outside who wanted to speak to me.

" ' What does he want ? ' I asked.

" The boy said he didn't know, but he had two coolies with him.

" ' Curse him,' I said. ' I'll give that sergeant hell if I find he's disturbed me for nothing.'

" I told the boy I'd come, and I finished playing the hand. Then I got up.

" ' I won't be a minute,' I said. ' Deal for me, will you ? ' I added to Cartwright.

" I went out and found the sergeant with two Malays waiting for me on the steps. I asked him what the devil he wanted. You can imagine my consternation when he told me that the Malays had come to the police-station and said there was a white man lying dead on the path that led through the jungle to Kabulong. I immediately thought of Bronson.

" ' Dead ? ' I cried.

" ' Yes, shot. Shot through the head. A white man with red hair.'

" Then I knew it could only be Reggie Bronson,

And indeed, one of them, naming his estate, said he had recognised him as the *tuan*. It was an awful shock. and there was Mrs. Bronson in the card-room waiting impatiently for me to sort my cards and make a bid. For a moment I really didn't know what to do. I was frightfully upset. It was dreadful to give her such a terrible and unexpected blow without a word of preparation, but I found myself quite unable to think of any way to soften it. I told the sergeant and the coolies to wait, and went back into the club. I tried to pull myself together. As I entered the card-room Mrs. Bronson said: 'You've been an awful long time.' Then she caught sight of my face. 'Is anything the matter?' I saw her clench her fists and go white. You'd have thought she had a presentiment of evil.

"'Something dreadful has happened,' I said, and my throat was all closed up so that my voice sounded even to me hoarse and uncanny. 'There's been an accident. Your husband's been wounded.'

"She gave a long gasp. It was not exactly a scream; it reminded me oddly of a piece of silk torn in two.

"'Wounded?'

"She leapt to her feet with her eyes starting from her head, and stared at Cartwright. The effect on him was ghastly. He fell back in his chair and went as white as death.

"'Very, very badly, I'm afraid,' I added.

"I knew that I must tell her the truth, and tell it then, but I couldn't bring myself to tell it all at once.

"'Is he'—her lips trembled so that she could hardly form the words—'is he—conscious?'

"I looked at her for a moment without answering. I'd have given a thousand pounds not to have to.

"'No, I'm afraid he isn't.'

"Mrs. Bronson stared at me as though she were trying to see right into my brain.

"'Is he dead?'

" I thought the only thing was to get it out and have done with it.

" ' Yes, he was dead when they found him.'

" Mrs. Bronson collapsed into her chair and burst into tears.

" ' Oh, my God ! ' she muttered. ' Oh, my God ! '

" The doctor's wife went to her and put her arms round her. Mrs. Bronson, with her face in her hands, swayed to and fro, weeping hysterically. Cartwright, with that livid face, sat quite still, his mouth open, and stared at her. You might have thought he was turned to stone.

" ' Oh, my dear, my dear,' said the doctor's wife, ' you must try and pull yourself together.' Then, turning to me: ' Get her a glass of water and fetch Harry.'

" Harry was her husband, and he was playing billiards. I went in and told him what had happened.

" ' A glass of water be damned,' he said. ' What she wants is a good long peg of brandy.'

" We took it in to her and forced her to drink it, and gradually the violence of her emotion exhausted itself. In a few minutes the doctor's wife was able to take her into the ladies' lavatory so that she might wash her face. I had made up my mind now what had better be done. I could see that Cartwright wasn't good for much; he was all to pieces. I could understand that it was a fearful shock to him, for, after all, Bronson was his greatest friend, and had done everything in the world for him.

" ' You look as though you'd be all the better for a drop of brandy yourself, old man,' I said to him.

" He made an effort.

" ' It's shaken me, you know,' he said. ' I . . . I didn't . . .' He stopped as though his mind was wandering; he was still fearfully pale. He took out a packet of cigarettes and struck a match, but his hand was shaking so that he could hardly manage it.

" ' Yes, I'll have a brandy.'

" ' Boy,' I shouted, and then to Cartwright: ' Now, are you fit to take Mrs. Bronson home? '

" ' Oh yes,' he answered.

" ' That's good. The doctor and I will go along with the coolies and some police to where the body is.'

" ' Will you bring him back to the bungalow? ' asked Cartwright.

" ' I think he'd better be taken straight to the mortuary,' said the doctor before I could answer. ' I shall have to do a P.M.'

" When Mrs. Bronson, now so much calmer that I was amazed, came back, I told her what I suggested. The doctor's wife, kind woman, offered to go with her and spend the night at the bungalow, but Mrs. Bronson would not hear of it. She said she would be perfectly all right, and when the doctor's wife insisted—you know how bent some people are on forcing their kindness on those in trouble—she turned on her almost fiercely.

" ' No, no; I must be alone,' she said. ' I really must. And Theo will be there.'

" They got into the trap. Theo took the reins and they drove off. We started after them, the doctor and I, while the sergeant and the coolies followed. I had sent my *seis* to the police-station with instructions to send two men to the place where the body was lying. We soon passed Mrs. Bronson and Cartwright.

" ' All right? ' I called.

" ' Yes,' he answered.

" We had to drive along the road that passed Bronson's estate and two miles further before we came to the short cut to Kabulong, along which poor Bronson had been killed. The Malays had been coming back from Kabulong when they found him. Fortunately the moon was full, and it was almost as light as day. For some time the doctor and I drove without saying a word; we were both of us deeply shocked. I was worried as well.

how or other I'd got to find the murderers, and I foresaw that it would be no easy matter.

" ' Do you suppose it was gang robbery? ' said the doctor at last.

" He might have been reading my thoughts.

" ' I don't think there's a doubt of it,' I answered. ' They knew he'd gone into Kabulong to get the wages, and lay in wait for him on the way back. Of course he should never have come alone through the jungle when everyone knew he had a large sum with him.'

" ' He'd done it for years,' said the doctor. ' And he's not the only one.'

" ' I know. The question is, how we're going to get hold of the fellows that did it.'

" ' You don't think the two coolies who say they found him could have had anything to do with it? '

" ' No. They wouldn't have the nerve. I think a pair of Chinks might think out a trick like that, but I don't believe Malays would. They'd be much too frightened. Of course we'll keep an eye on them. We shall soon see if they seem to have any money to fling about.'

" ' It's awful for Mrs. Bronson,' said the doctor. ' It would have been bad enough at any time, but now she's going to have a baby . . .'

" ' I didn't know that,' I said, interrupting him.

" ' No, for some reason she wanted to keep it dark. She was rather funny about it, I thought.'

" I recollected then that little passage between Mrs. Bronson and the doctor's wife. I understood why that good woman had been so anxious that Mrs. Bronson should not overtire herself.

" ' It's strange her having a baby after being married so many years.'

" ' It happens, you know. But it was a surprise to her. When first she came to see me and I told her what was the matter, she fainted, and then she began to cry. I should have thought she'd be as pleased as Punch.

She told me that Bronson didn't like children, and he'd be awfully bored at the idea, and she made me promise to say nothing about it till she had and a chance of breaking it to him gradually.'

" I reflected for a moment.

" He was the kind of breezy, hearty cove whom you'd expect to be as keen as mustard on having kids.

" ' You never can tell. Some people are very selfish, and just don't want the bother.'

" ' Well, how did he take it when she did tell him? Wasn't he rather bucked? '

" ' I don't know that she ever told him. Though she could not have waited much longer ; unless I'm very much mistaken she ought to be confined in about five months.'

" ' Poor devil,' I said. ' You know, I've got a notion that he'd have been most awfully pleased to know.'

" We drove in silence for the rest of the way, and at last came to the point at which Bronson, riding along the path, should have found the road. Here we stopped, and in a minute or two my trap in which were the police-sergeant and the two Malays came up. We took the head-lamps to light us on our way. I left the doctor's *seis* to look after the ponies, and told him that when the police-men came they were to follow the path till they found us. The two coolies, carrying the lamps, walked ahead, and we followed them. It was a fairly broad track, wide enough for a small cart to pass, and before the road was built it had been the highway between Kabulong and Alor Lipis. It was firm to the foot and good walking. The surface here and there was sandy, and in places you could see quite plainly the trace of Bronson's bicycle that he had left on his way into Kabulong early in the day.

" We walked twenty minutes, I should think, in single file, and on a sudden the coolies, with a cry, stopped sharply. The sight had come upon them so abruptly

that, notwithstanding they were expecting it, they were startled. There, in the middle of the pathway, lit fitfully by the lamps the coolies carried, lay Bronson. He had fallen over his bicycle, and lay across it in an ungainly heap. I was too shocked to speak, and I think the doctor was, too. But in our silence the din of the jungle was deafening; those damned cicadas and the bull-frogs were making enough row to wake the dead. Even under ordinary circumstances the noise of the jungle at night always seems to me uncanny; because you feel that at that hour there should be an utter silence, it has an odd effect on you, that ceaseless and invisible uproar that beats upon your nerves. It surrounds you and hems you in. But just then, believe me, it was terrifying. That poor fellow lay dead, and all round him the restless life of the jungle pursued its indifferent and ferocious course.

"He was lying face downwards. The sergeant and the coolies looked at me as though awaiting an order. I was a young fellow then, and I'm afraid I felt a little frightened. Though I could not see the face, I had no doubt that it was Bronson, but I felt that I ought to turn the body over to make sure. I suppose we all have our little squeamishnesses; you know I've always had a horrible distaste for touching dead bodies. I've had to do it fairly often now, but it still makes me feel slightly sick.

"'It's Bronson all right,' I said.

"The doctor—by George, it was lucky for me he was there—the doctor bent down and turned the head. The sergeant directed the lamp on the dead face.

"'My God, half his head's been shot away,' I cried.

"'Yes.'

"The doctor stood up straight and wiped his hands on the leaves of a tree that grew beside the path.

"'Is he quite dead?' I asked.

"'Oh yes. Death must have been instantaneous. Whoever shot him must have fired at pretty close range.'

" ' How long has he been dead, d'you think ? '

" ' Oh, I don't know—several hours.'

" ' He would have passed here about five o'clock, I suppose, if he was expecting to get to the club for a rubber at six.'

" ' There's no sign of any struggle,' said the doctor.

" ' No, there wouldn't be. He was shot as he was riding along.'

" I looked at the body for a little while. I couldn't help thinking how short a time ago it was since Bronson, noisy and loud-voiced, had been so full of hearty life.

" ' You haven't forgotten that he had the coolies' wages on him,' said the doctor.

" ' No ; we had better search him.'

" ' Shall we turn him over ? '

" ' Wait a minute. Let us just have a look at the ground first.'

" I took the lamp and as carefully as I could looked all about me. Just where he had fallen the sandy pathway was trodden and confused ; there were our footprints and the footprints of the coolies who had just found him. I walked back two or three paces, and then saw quite clearly the mark of his bicycle wheels ; he had been riding straight and steadily. I followed it to the spot where he had fallen, to just before that, rather, and there saw very distinctly the prints, on each side of the wheels, of his heavy boots. He had evidently stopped there and put his feet to the ground. Then he'd started off again, there was a great wobble of the wheel, and he'd crashed.

" ' Now let's search him,' I said.

" The doctor and the sergeant turned the body over, and one of the coolies dragged the bicycle away. They laid Bronson on his back. I supposed he would have had the money partly in notes and partly in silver. The silver would have been in a bag attached to the bicycle, and a hasty glance told me that it was not there. The notes he would have put in a wallet. It would have been

a good thick bundle. I felt him all over, but there was nothing. Then I turned out the pockets. They were all empty except the right trousers pocket, in which there was a little small change.

" ' Didn't he always wear a watch ? ' asked the doctor.

" ' Yes, of course he did.'

" I remembered that he wore the chain through the buttonhole in the lapel of his coat, and the watch and some seals and things in his handkerchief pocket. But watch and chain were gone.

" ' Well, there's not much doubt now, is there ? ' I said. It was clear that he had been attacked by gang robbers who knew he had a good sum of money on him, and after killing him they had stripped him of everything. I suddenly remembered the footprints that proved that for a moment he had stood still. I saw exactly how it had been done. One of them had stopped him on some pretext, and then, just as he started off again, another, slipping out of the jungle behind him, had emptied the two barrels of a gun into his head.

" ' Well,' I said to the doctor, ' it's up to me to catch them, and I'll tell you what—it'll be a real pleasure to me to see them hanged.'

" Of course, there was an inquest. Mrs. Bronson gave evidence, but she had nothing to say that we did not know already. Bronson had left the bungalow about eleven. He was to have tiffin at Kabulong, and was to be back between five and six. He asked her not to wait for him. He said he would just put the money into the safe and come straight to the club. Cartwright confirmed this. He had lunched alone with Mrs. Bronson, and after a smoke he had gone out with a gun to shoot pigeon. He had got in about five—a little before, perhaps—had a bath, and changed to play tennis. He was shooting not far from the place where Bronson was killed, but never heard a shot. That, of course, meant nothing; what with the cicadas and frogs and the other sounds of the jungle,

he would have had to be very near to hear anything; and besides, Cartwright was probably back in the bungalow before Bronson was killed. We traced Bronson's movements. He had lunched at the club, he had got money at the bank just before it closed, had gone back to the club, and had one more drink, and then started off on his bicycle. He had crossed the river by the ferry. The ferryman remembered distinctly seeing him, but was positive that no one else with a bicycle had crossed. That looked as though the murderers were not following, but lying in wait for him. He rode along the main road for a couple of miles, and then took the path which was a short cut to his bungalow.

"It looked as though he had been killed by men who knew his habits, and suspicion, of course, fell immediately on the coolies of his estate. We examined them all—pretty carefully—but there was not a scrap of evidence to connect any of them with the crime. In fact, most of them were able satisfactorily to account for their actions, and those who couldn't seemed to me for one reason and another out of the running. There were a few bad characters among the Chinese at Alor Lipis, and I had them looked up. But somehow I didn't think it was the work of the Chinese; I had a feeling that Chinese would have used revolvers and not a shot-gun. Anyhow, I could find out nothing there. So then we offered a reward of a thousand dollars to anyone who could put us in the way of discovering the murderers. I thought there were a good many people to whom it would appeal to do a public service and at the same time earn a tidy sum. But I knew that an informer would take no risks; he wouldn't want to tell what he knew till he knew he could tell it safely, and I armed myself with patience. The reward had brightened the interest of my police, and I knew they would use every means they had to bring the criminals to trial. In a case like this they could do more than I.

" But it was strange, nothing happened; the reward seemed to tempt no one. I cast my net a little wider. There were two or three *kampongs* along the road, and I wondered if the murderers were there; I saw the headmen, but got no help from them. It was not that they would tell me nothing; I was sure that they had nothing to tell. I talked to the bad hats, but there was absolutely nothing to connect them with the murder. There was not the shadow of a clue.

" ' Very well, my lads,' I said to myself, as I drove back to Alor Lipis, ' there's no hurry; the rope won't spoil by keeping.'

" The scoundrels had got away with a considerable sum, but money is no good unless you spend it. I felt I knew the native temperament enough to be sure that the possession of it was a constant temptation. The Malays are an extravagant race, and a race of gamblers, and the Chinese are gamblers, too. Sooner or later someone would start flinging his money about, and then I should want to know where it came from. With a few well-directed questions I thought I could put the fear of God into the fellow, and then, if I knew my business, it should not be hard to get a full confession.

" The only thing now was to sit down and wait till the hue and cry and died down and the murderers thought the affair was forgotten. The itch to spend those ill-gotten dollars would grow more and more intolerable, till at last it could be resisted no longer. I would go about my business, but I meant never to relax my watch, and one day, sooner or later, my time must come.

" Cartwright took Mrs. Bronson down to Singapore. The company Bronson had worked for asked him if he would care to take Bronson's place, but he said, very naturally, that he didn't like the idea of it; so they put another man in, and told Cartwright that he could have the job that Bronson's successor had vacated. It was the management of the estate that Cartwright lives on now.

He moved in at once. Four months after this Olive was born at Singapore, and a few months later, when Bronson had been dead just over a year, Cartwright and Mrs. Bronson were married. I was surprised; but on thinking it over I couldn't help confessing that it was very natural. After the trouble, Mrs. Bronson had leant much on Cartwright, and he had arranged everything for her. She must have been lonely and rather lost, and I daresay she was grateful for his kindness. He did behave like a brick; and so far as he was concerned I imagined he was sorry for her. It was a dreadful position for a woman; she had nowhere to go, and all they'd gone through must have been a tie between them. There was every reason for them to marry, and it was probably the best thing for them both.

"It looked as though Bronson's murderers would never be caught, for that plan of mine did not work. There was no one in the district who spent more money than he could account for, and if anyone had that hoard buried away under his floor, he was showing a self-control that was superhuman. A year had passed, and to all intents and purposes the thing was forgotten. Could anyone be so prudent as after so long not to let a little money dribble out? It was incredible. I began to think that Bronson had been killed by a couple of wandering Chinese who had got away, to Singapore, perhaps, where there would be small chance of catching them. At last I gave it up. If you come to think of it, as a rule, it is just those crimes—crimes of robbery—in which there is least chance of getting the culprit, for there is nothing to attach suspicion to him, and if he is caught it can only be by his own carelessness. It is different with crimes of passion or vengeance; then you can find out who had a motive to put the victim out of the way.

"It's no use grizzling over one's failures; and bringing my common sense to bear, I did my best to put the matter

out of my mind. No one likes to be beaten, but beaten I was, and I had to put as good a face on it as I could.

And then a Chinaman was caught trying to pawn poor Bronson's watch.

"I told you that Bronson's watch and chain had been taken, and of course Mrs. Bronson was able to give us a fairly accurate description of it. It was a half-hunter, by Benson; there was a gold chain, three or four seals, and a sovereign purse. The pawnbroker was an astute fellow, and when the Chinaman brought the watch in he recognised it at once. On some pretext he kept the man waiting and sent for a policeman. The man was arrested and immediately brought to me. I greeted him like a long-lost brother. I was never so pleased to see anyone in my life. I have no feeling about criminals, you know. I'm rather sorry for them, because they're playing a game in which their opponents hold all the aces and kings; but when I catch one it gives me a little thrill of satisfaction, like bringing off a neat finesse at bridge. At last the mystery was going to be cleared up, for if the Chinaman had not committed the murder himself, we were pretty sure through him to trace the murderers. I beamed on him.

"I asked him to account for his possession of the watch. He said he had bought it from a man he did not know. That was very thin. I explained the circumstances briefly, and told him he would be charged with murder. I meant to frighten him, and I did. He said then that he'd found the watch.

"'Found it?' I said. 'Fancy that! Where?'

"His answer staggered me. He said he'd found it in the jungle. I laughed at him. I asked him if he thought watches were likely to be left lying about in the jungle. Then he said he'd been coming along the pathway that led from Kabulong to Alor Lipis, and had gone into the jungle, and had caught sight of something gleaming, and there was the watch. That was odd. Why

should he have said he'd found the watch just there? It was either true or excessively astute. I asked him where the chain and the seals were, and he produced them immediately. I'd got him scared, and he was pale and shaking. He was a knock-kneed little fellow, and I should have been a fool not to see that I hadn't got hold of the murderer there. But his terror suggested that he knew something.

" I asked him when he'd found the watch.

" ' Yesterday,' he said.

" I asked him what he was doing on the short cut from Kabulong to Alor Lipis. He said that he'd been working in Singapore and had gone to Kabulong because his father was ill, and now was come to Alor Lipis to work. A friend of his father, a carpenter by trade, had given him a job. He gave me the name of the man with whom he had worked in Singapore and the name of the man who had engaged him at Alor Lipis. All he said seemed plausible, and could so easily be verified that it was hardly likely to be false. Of course it occurred to me that if he had found the watch as he said it must have been lying in the jungle for more than a year. It could hardly be in very good condition. I tried to open it, but could not. The pawnbroker had come to the police-station, and was waiting in the next room. Luckily he was also something of a watchmaker. I sent for him, and asked him to look at the watch. When he opened it he gave a little whistle—the works were thick with rust.

" ' This watch no good,' he said, shaking his head. ' Him never go now.'

" I asked him what had put it in such a state, and without a word from he me said that it had been long exposed to wet. For the moral effect I had the prisoner put in a cell, and I sent for his employer. I also sent a wire to Kabulong and to Singapore. While I waited I did my best to put two and two together. I was

inclined to believe the man's story true; his fear might be ascribed to no more guilt than consisted in his having found something and tried to sell it. Even quite innocent persons are apt to be nervous and lose their heads when they are in the hands of the police. I don't know what there is about a policeman; people are never very much at their ease in his company. But if he really had found the watch where he said, someone had thrown it there. Now that was a funny thing to do. Even if the murderers had thought the watch a dangerous thing to possess, one would have expected them to melt down the gold case. That would be a very simple thing for any native to do; and the chain was of so ordinary a pattern they could hardly have thought it possible to trace that. There were chains like it in every jeweller's shop in the country. Of course, there was the possibility that they had plunged into the jungle and, having dropped the watch in their hurry, had been afraid to go back and look for it. I did not think that very likely; the Malays are used to keeping things tucked away in their *sarongs*, and the Chinese have pockets in their coats. Besides, the moment they got into the jungle they knew there was no hurry. They probably waited and divided the swag then and there.

"In a few minutes the man I had sent for came to the police-station and confirmed what the prisoner had said, and in an hour I got an answer from Kabulong. The police had seen his father, who told them that the boy had gone to Alor Lipis to get a job with a carpenter. So far everything he had said seemed to be true. I had him brought in again, and told him I was going to take him to the place where he said he had found the watch, and he must show me the exact spot. I handcuffed him to a policeman—though it was hardly necessary, for the poor devil was shaking with fright—and took a couple of men besides. We drove out to where the track joined the road and walked along it. Within five yards of the place where Bronson was killed the Chinaman stopped.

" ' Here,' he said.

" He pointed to the jungle, and we followed him in. We went in about ten yards, and he pointed to a chink between two large boulders, and said that he found the watch there. It could only have been by the merest chance that he had noticed it, and if he really had found it there, it looked very much as though someone had put it there to hide it."

Gaze stopped and gave me a reflective look.

" What would you have thought then ? " he asked.

" I don't know," I answered.

" Well, I'll tell you what I thought. I thought that if the watch was there the money might be there too. It seemed worth while having a look. Of course, to look for something in the jungle makes looking for a needle in a bundle of hay a drawing-room pastime. I couldn't help that. I released the Chinaman—I wanted all the help I could get—and set him to work. I set my three men to work, and I started in myself. We made a line—there were five of us—and we searched from the road. For fifty yards on each side of the place at which Bronson was murdered and for a hundred yards in we went over the ground foot by foot. We routed among dead leaves and peered in bushes ; we looked inside boulders and in the hollows of trees. I knew it was a foolish thing to do, for the chances against us were a thousand to one. My only hope was that anyone who had just committed a murder would be rattled, and if he wanted to hide anything would hide it quickly ; he would choose the first obvious hiding-place that offered itself. That is what he had done when he hid the watch. My only reason for looking in so circumscribed an area was that, as the watch had been found so near the road, the person who wanted to get rid of the things must have wanted to get rid of them quickly.

" We worked on. I began to grow tired and cross. We were sweating like pigs. I had a maddening thirst

and nothing in the world to drink. At last I came to the conclusion that we must give it up as a bad job, for that day at least, when suddenly the Chinaman—he must have had sharp eyes, that young man—uttered a guttural cry. He stooped down and from under the winding root of a tree drew out a messy, mouldering, stinking thing. It was a pocket-book that had been out in the rain for a year, that had been eaten by ants and beetles and God knows what, that was sodden and foul, but it was a pocket-book all right, Bronson's, and inside were the shapeless, mushed-up, fetid remains of the Singapore notes he had got from the bank at Kabulong. There was still the silver, and I was convinced that it was hidden somewhere about, but I was not going to bother about that. I had found out something very important: whoever had murdered Bronson had made no money out of it.

"Do you remember my telling you that I had noticed the print of Bronson's feet on each side of the broad line of the pneumatic tyre, where he had stopped, and presumably spoken to someone? He was a heavy man and the prints were well marked. He hadn't just put his feet on the soft sand and taken them off, but must have stopped at least for a minute or two. My explanation was that he had stopped to chat with a Malay or a Chinaman, but the more I thought of it the less I liked it. Why the devil should he? Bronson wanted to get home, and though a jovial chap, he certainly was not hail-fellow-well-met with the natives. His relations towards them were those of master and servants. Those footprints had always puzzled me. And now the truth flashed across me. Whoever had murdered Bronson hadn't murdered him to rob, and if he'd stopped to talk with someone it could only be with a friend. I knew at last who the murderer was."

I have always thought the detective story a most diverting and ingenious variety of fiction, and have regretted that I never had the skill to write one, but I have read a good many, and I flatter myself it is rarely that

I have not solved the mystery before it was disclosed to me; and now for some time I had foreseen what Gaze was going to say, but when at last he said it I confess that it gave me, notwithstanding, somewhat of a shock.

"The man he met was Cartwright. Cartwright was pigeon-shooting. He stopped and asked him what sport he had had, and as he rode on Cartwright raised his gun and discharged both barrels into his head. Cartwright took the money and the watch in order to make it look like the work of gang robbers and hurriedly hid them in the jungle, then made his way along the edge till he got to the road, went back to the bungalow, changed into his tennis things and drove with Mrs. Bronson to the club.

"I remembered how badly he'd played tennis, and how he'd collapsed when, in order to break the news more gently to Mrs. Bronson, I said Bronson was wounded and not dead. If he was only wounded he might have been able to speak. By George! I bet that was a bad moment. The child was Cartwright's. Look at Olive: why, you saw the likeness yourself. The doctor said that Mrs. Bronson was upset when he told her she was going to have a baby, and made him promise not to tell Bronson. Why? Because Bronson knew that he couldn't be the father of the child."

"Do you think that Mrs. Bronson knew what Cartwright had done?" I asked.

"I'm sure of it. When I look back on her behaviour that evening at the club I am convinced of it. She was upset, but not because Bronson was killed; she was upset because I told her he was wounded. When I confessed that he was dead when they found him she burst out crying, but from relief. I know that woman. Look at that square chin of hers and tell me that she hasn't got the courage of the devil. She has a will of iron. She made Cartwright do it. She planned every detail and every move. He was completely under her influence; he is now."

"But do you mean to tell me that neither you nor anyone else ever suspected that there was anything between them?"

"Never. Never."

"If they were in love with one another and knew that she was going to have a baby, why didn't they just bolt?"

"How could they? It was Bronson who had the money; she hadn't a bean and neither had Cartwright. He was out of a job. Do you think he would have got another with that story round his neck? Bronson had taken him in when he was starving and he'd stolen his wife from him. They wouldn't have had a dog's chance. They couldn't afford to let the truth come out; their only chance was to get Bronson out of the way, and they got him out of the way."

"They might have thrown themselves on his mercy."

"Yes, but I think they were too ashamed. He'd been so good to them, he was such a decent chap, I don't think they had the heart to tell him the truth. They preferred to kill him."

There was a moment's silence while I reflected over what Gaze said.

"Well, what did you do about it?" I asked.

"Nothing. What was there to do? What was the evidence? That the watch and notes had been found? They might easily have been hidden by someone who was afterwards afraid to come and get them. The murderer might have been quite content to get away with the silver. The footprints? Bronson might have stopped to light a cigarette or there might have been a tree-trunk across the path and he waited while the coolies he met there by chance moved it away. Who could prove that the child that a perfectly decent, respectable woman had had four months after her husband's death was not his child? No jury would have convicted Cartwright. I held my tongue and the Bronson murder was forgotten."

"I don't suppose the Cartwrights have forgotten," I suggested.

"I shouldn't be surprised. Human memory is astonishingly short, and if you want my professional opinion I don't mind telling you that I don't believe remorse for a crime ever sits very heavily on a man when he's absolutely sure he'll never be found out."

I thought once more of the pair I had met that afternoon: the thin, elderly, bald man with gold-rimmed spectacles, and that white-haired, untidy woman with her frank speech and kindly, caustic smile. It was almost impossible to imagine that in the distant past they had been swayed by so turbulent a passion, for that alone had made their behaviour explicable, that it had brought them in the end to such a pass that they could see no other issue than a cruel and cold-blooded murder.

"Doesn't it make you feel a little uncomfortable to be with them?" I asked Gaze. "For without wishing to be censorious I'm bound to say that I don't think they can be very nice people."

"That's where you're wrong. They are very nice people; they're about the pleasantest people here. Mrs. Cartwright is a thoroughly good sort and a very amusing woman. It's my business to prevent crime and to catch the culprit when crime is committed, but I've known far too many criminals to think that on the whole they're worse than anybody else. A perfectly decent fellow may be driven by circumstances to commit a crime, and if he's found out he's punished; but he may very well remain a perfectly decent fellow. Of course, society punishes him if he breaks its laws, and it's quite right, but it's not always his actions that indicate the essential man. If you'd been a policeman as long as I have, you'd know it's not what people do that really matters, it's what they are. Luckily a policeman has nothing to do with their thoughts, only with their deeds; if he

had, it would be a very different, a much more difficult matter."

Gaze flicked the ash from his cheroot and gave me his wry, sardonic, but agreeable smile.

"I'll tell you what, there's one job I *shouldn't* like," he said.

"What is that?" I asked.

"God's, at the Judgment Day," said Gaze. "No, sir."

THE LOVELY VOICE

By Lady Cynthia Asquith

I WONDER why it is that in my old age I should feel prompted to set down this experience of a far-off girlhood. Partly, perhaps, because of our last night's conversation concerning murder.

We argued so long as to whether there was necessarily anything exceptional about the character of a murderer; my grandson maintaining that murder, like other actions, was in most cases merely the result of circumstances, and no indication of the essential man.

"The act of murder," he asserted, "is far more of a fluke than many deeds not punishable by law. If you tell me that a man is habitually rude to his servant, you give me some insight into his personality and character, but by merely informing me of the fact that he has committed murder, you leave me in complete ignorance as to his nature."

I wonder.

Long, long ago, when I was thirteen years old, for the sake of acquiring French and health I passed a whole summer in a hotel in France. There is no object in giving the name of the town. Let it suffice that it was large and on the edge of a magnificent forest. My governess and I shared a double room, one in which we did lessons as well as slept. An admirable woman, Mademoiselle Plage but by no means an enthralling companion. By sheer force of will she succeeded in holding my attention during lesson hours, but for the

remainder of the day she did nothing whatever to occupy my mind. Her conversation offered neither instruction nor amusement. But I was very far from being bored. At that age the mere fact of staying in a large hotel was sufficient entertainment. The glamour of "pricky" water (plain was considered unsafe) never palled. The waiters were friendly, and it was lovely to be asked *which* sweet I would have. Above all, there was my unfailing interest in the varied visitors who perpetually came and went. Unlike us, these were mostly birds of swift passage, and, nearly every time I entered the *table d'hôte* there would be some new-comer to stare at.

I wonder how often Mademoiselle told me that it was "rude to stare." She wasted her breath. She might just as well have asked me to stop breathing, so enthralled was I by this succession of human beings—by their faces, their voices, their clothes, and their manners.

Towards the end of July the stream of visitors thinned, and during that peculiarly sultry August the hotel was far too empty to please me.

I mention this and the fact of Mademoiselle's dullness to show that my mind was unoccupied and therefore all the more liable to receive vivid impressions.

If I was not consciously hungry for distraction, I was at least especially susceptible to it.

One day towards the end of the month the heat was so intense that we were obliged to leave the door as well as the window of our room wide open. I always found lessons particularly difficult in hot weather, and just then was staring in sticky despair at the sum confronting me. Any distraction would have been most welcome, and at the sound of approaching footsteps and the chatter of voices I pricked up my ears. Through the open door I saw the concierge, bowing and smiling, followed by two vividly-dressed, rustling ladies. It was only a fleeting glimpse that I caught, but it was enough to give an impression of almost startlingly brilliant smartness, and even

now I can still smell the strong whiff of sweet, exotic perfume that came with the new arrivals. Most children have a dislike of artificial scent, and I remember wrinkling my nose with repugnance.

"Par ici," said the concierge, and I heard the silken dresses of the ladies rustle into the room next to ours.

A peculiarly pleasant, fluting voice complained of the "grand chaleur," and their door was left wide open. Thus, for the remaining half-hour of my lessons, I could plainly hear the two foreign voices. I understood French as easily as English and, to the destruction of my arithmetic, I listened to their ceaseless conversation. It was real chatter, a bright babble of words punctuated by gay laughter.

The voice I had first distinguished—an enchanting voice—appeared to do practically all the talking. Certainly it initiated every topic. In strong contrast to its rippling vivacity, the other voice was markedly toneless; a sort of flat lifelessness conveying the impression of a rather dull personality. Yet her animated friend seemed sufficiently satisfied with her company.

They talked of their journey, their clothes, their plans for the morrow. Scattered through the conversation I frequently heard "Ma chérie,"—occasionally "Mon ange."

The chambermaid, who brought in our hot water, announced that two "Parisiennes d'une grande élégance" had arrived. Anxious to be in time to see the entry of the new arrivals, I hurried downstairs to the dining-room.

They were late, but when they did appear my expectations were far from disappointed. A lovely slender young woman sailed—there is no other word for such motion—into the room, followed by her equally well-dressed but otherwise unprepossessing companion. To my delight they sat down at the nearest table to ours, and the lovely one began to speak in the voice that I had already thought so enchanting upstairs.

I was riveted by the beauty of this young Parisian.

Not only was she utterly lovely with a peculiarly dewy loveliness, but there was about her a flowing grace such as I have never seen equalled. She seemed to bask in her own beauty, of which she was inevitably and simply aware.

"What fun it all is! How lucky we are to be alive!" her glittering glance seemed to say even when it fell on the jaded, slatternly waiter from whom she might have been ordering so much nectar and ambrosia instead of gigôt and mineral water.

Even Mademoiselle, who was not addicted to personal remarks, actually sighed out the word "Ravissante," as she blinked at the lovely being. The flower-like skin of the radiant young woman struck me as being of a fairness amazingly in contrast to her extremely dark hair, eyebrows, and lashes. I have never seen such startling whiteness crowned by black hair.

She shimmered.

Her companion was indeed an admirable foil, the one being as opaque as the other was translucent. Probably she was still nearly as young as she had ever seemed, but in her slow, unventilated face and her flat, springless voice, there was something definitely dreary.

I wondered why two such utterly different women should be together, and concluded that they must be related. Not that there were any signs of strain. The lovely woman's talk never flagged. Her voice was like running water from which a delicious spray of laughter was frequently shaken. If her companion contributed but little, she was at least a rapt and most appreciative listener. Evidently she doted on her brilliant friend. So spoke the humble, adoring eyes and the delighted, unmusical chuckles with which she greeted her sallies.

After all these obliterating years, I can still hear the quality of the voice to which she listened. Not only so lovely and liquid in tone, but of such flexibility that its intonations seemed, as it were, to thread the

intricate mazes of a minuet and to curtsey with wincing appreciation of what it told.

Her conversation was of people, of books, of plays, of clothes, and to a child inured in schoolroom routine, redolent of varied interest and amusement.

After luncheon we moved into what would now be called the lounge, where my governess pounced on a dreary newspaper.

To my delight, the two ladies soon came in. Catching sight of me, the lovely one's eyes lit up. "Hurrah! A child! Perhaps she'll be fun," they seemed to say.

Tall, undulating, smiling as she swayed across the room, in a moment she had joined me, and in charming broken English began to talk, not condescendingly as a grown-up person to a child, but rationally as to an equal.

I don't know how to convey to what extent I was fascinated. Suffice it to say that I became a complete convert to the use of scent. She drew me towards her friend, saying she must let me hear her repeating watch, which "loffly chimes played." The other woman obligingly showed me her pretty toy, and beneath her drab exterior and commonplace manners, child as I was, I could see the floor of her nature's steady kindliness shining like metal through muddy waters.

Reluctantly I was dragged away for my afternoon's walk, and, to my great disappointment, the ladies did not appear in the lounge for tea. I was never allowed to come down to the evening meal, and at seven I was sent to bed. I went upstairs the victim of a raging cult. I was obsessed by the lovely stranger.

The night was stifling—the hottest of all that grilling year—and it was considered necessary to leave our door wide open. Even so, there seemed no air to breathe. I lay and panted in my bed, and when Mademoiselle joined me at about ten o'clock I was still wide awake. Her complaints of the heat soon subsided into noisy slumber,

but I had now determined to stay awake until the ladies in the next room came upstairs.

I pined to hear that enchanting voice again, for, lovely as was her face, it was her voice that had so completely captivated me.

It must have been long past eleven when at last the sultry silence was broken by the sound of fashionable high heels clicking along the parquet floor, and the notes of the voice for which I so eagerly listened. They passed by. In French I heard the lovely voice say that the door must be kept open on account of the heat. I was delighted. Hurrah! I should be able to hear their talk. This night there would be no slipping off to sleep from a dreary, lonely silence.

"It is so lovely to be here with you, mon ange," said the dull voice. She spoke, of course, in French, but I have forgotten her exact words. "With you one cannot have one dull moment," she went on, and I heard the sound of repeated kisses. I was struck by such demonstrative devotion.

"You are looking so lovely," she continued, "but, oh, how I miss your glorious red-gold hair! How could you have spoilt it just for the sake of this one ball?"

"Oh, well," answered the voice, "Medea cannot possibly have anything but black hair, can she? And wigs always look so unnatural. You can't get them right! Besides, the man who dyed it swears it will be quite itself again in three months."

"I admire your zeal," said her friend, "but I deplore the sacrifice."

It did, indeed, seem extraordinary zeal to dye your hair for a fancy-dress ball. With the natural Puritanism of childhood, only the day before such an idea would have disgusted me, but in my present state of infatuation it seemed yet another symptom of her adorable zest for life. Excessive vitality mocks at a sense of proportion.

Besides, I rejoiced to hear that my lovely lady's hair

was naturally auburn—my favourite colour. Against the dazzling fairness of her complexion, the intense darkness of her hair had seemed almost hard. Yes, a red-gold aureole would be far more becoming and immensely enhance her fairy-tale loveliness. I longed to see her as Nature had designed her.

For several minutes the conversation ran on about the fancy-dress ball—as to who was going, as which character, how much this and that lady had paid for their costumes, and so on.

"What an extraordinary whim of Madame de B——," said the dull voice, "that she must needs give a big charity ball now, when no one is naturally in Paris. But she never did do anything like anyone else."

"No; and can you wonder?" said *the* voice, and here it dropped to inaudible whispering, which was followed by such loud laughter from both friends that, to my annoyance, Mademoiselle woke up.

"I cannot stand such chatter!" she exclaimed angrily. "Even heat is preferable. Let us cook in silence and peace."

She banged the door, and my evening's entertainment was at an end.

It had been such a treat listening to their conversation, and now, alas! I could no longer distinguish their words, though, as the wall was thin, I could still hear the sound of ceaseless talk and laughter. On and on it went. The first streaks of dawn were thinning the darkness before I fell asleep, but even then the ladies had not yet finished what my daughters—before they shingled—would have called their "hair-combing."

They did not come down to breakfast whilst I was in the dining-room, and you may be sure that I lingered as long as possible. Probably they had trays upstairs, but they must have gone out fairly early, for no sound came from their room during my dreary lesson hours.

The day was distinctly cooler, and at half-past eleven we were able to start out for a walk.

During this long summer, my main hope of excitement lay in desperate attempts to get lost in the huge forest on whose borders our hotel stood. This craving for adventure was never gratified. Mademoiselle's bump of locality was inconveniently well developed. Unerringly she could find the shortest way home. However, she was blessedly passive as to the direction in which we took our walks. In fact, she was completely indifferent as to where we went. Provided that I followed her home directly she pronounced it time, I was allowed to ramble at will through the more out-of-the-way and unfrequented paths of that lovely forest.

That morning, after three-quarters of an hour's walk, when we came to a sudden turning which disclosed a new long vista, to my great delight I saw at some distance —I suppose about fifty yards off—two figures that I immediately recognised as the two Parisian ladies, one of whom had occupied most of my thoughts during the walk. Surrounded by the paraphernalia of a picnic, they were both leaning against the broad trunk of an oak tree whose spreading branches overshadowed the little footpath leading past it. Their sun-flecked dresses made gay splashes of colour against the heavy green of late summer.

My yesterday's interview with the lady of the lovely voice made me feel quite confident of a delightful welcome, and, with all the impetus of a bored child in sight of diversion, I ran towards them. I was disappointed. Not in the lady's beauty—she was dressed in dryad green and her complexion glowed in the strong sunshine—but in the expression of her face.

Though she smiled quite civilly, her eyes showed no pleasure, and yesterday they had literally shone with welcome.

I felt dashed. I had so looked forward to the tonic of her gay responsiveness.

Oddly enough, it was her sallow friend who appeared most pleased to see me. A placid good-humour irradiated her plain face. She offered me chocolates, and her accomplished watch was again put through its tricks. By this time Mademoiselle had reached us. Characteristically she announced that it was time to go back for *déjeuner* —"tout de suite."

"It is to-day so luffly," said the plain lady, "that we are going to—how you say?—peek-neek. I wish that you might join vith us, but unhappily ve have not enough of proveesions."

The lovely lady, on whose face I had seen a fleeting frown, now beamed, agreeing that it was a "big peety."

Reluctantly I followed Mademoiselle's remorseless back.

To eat in one's fingers under that glorious tree and in such enchanting company would indeed have been a romantic break in the monotonous routine of my *tête-à-tête* with Mademoiselle.

In spite of her disappointing greeting, which had greatly disconcerted me, the attraction of the lady with the lovely voice was still so strong that, when we set out for our afternoon walk, I felt irresistibly drawn back to the site of the picnic in the hope that the two friends might still be lingering in so pleasant a spot.

I had no difficulty in finding the way back. I hurried, outstripping Mademoiselle, and when I turned the corner which brought the great oak into sight, to my delight I saw that the two ladies were still there. The tall figure in green had risen to her feet, and, with her back towards me, stood stooping down over the other, who still leant against the tree.

I was so delighted to see them that, waving my hand, I shouted a joyous "Hullo!" The tall green figure, dappled by sunshine, turned round suddenly and signalled to me to stop. At that distance I could, of course, not see the expression of her face, but there was

no mistaking her almost violent gesture. She was waving me back, checking my approach, as might a nurse in charge of a sleeping child. Surprised, I stood still and stared.

The graceful green figure stooped low. Obviously she was kissing her friend. Again I was struck by such demonstrative affection. At least three kisses must have been given before she turned round and began to walk towards me. Half-way between me and the tree she looked back, and, waving her hand, called out, "Au revoir, chérie!" To my surprise there was no response from her friend, not even a nod of the head or a wave of the hand as she reclined, rather stiffly, propped up against the tree-trunk, her smart winged hat slightly tilted to one side, one hand holding up her somewhat garish parasol, the other lying in her lap beside a few wild flowers and one half of an orange. I remember noticing how almost exactly the orange matched the parasol, the top of which rested against the tree. Obviously she must have closed her eyes, else I could not imagine her failing to return her friend's wave of the hand. Asleep she could not be, the elbow of the arm holding up the parasol was bent in too acute an angle. In fact, in her whole attitude there was nothing to suggest sleep.

But I had scarcely had time to know that I had noticed any of these details before the lady with the lovely voice reached me, and Mademoiselle, who had just joined me. She looked flushed, and spoke quickly.

"My friend is feeling the heat," she said. "So she stays here to repose herself. I go back to the hotel to pay ze bill and fetch our baggage, and vill pick her up. Ze road comes not so very far off, I know, for we drove out zis morning, and only valked perhaps a quarter of an hour. I did not vant you to come close just now, because my poor friend is so nervous when she has the *migraine*. Absolute quiet is to her then necessary. It will no doubt be yesterday's sun that has her made ill."

I paid little heed to her account of her friend's indisposition. The mention of luggage and paying the bill had quenched my spirits. So they were going away to-day! Somehow I had assumed that they were to make a long stay, and I felt ridiculously dejected. Probably I should never see her again.

Tears of disappointment came into my eyes, but they were not observed. Mademoiselle's corns were worrying her, and the lady seemed agitated about her friend's *migraine.*

" Now, little one," she said, still speaking very quickly, and in a voice not quite the one I loved, " please show me the quickest way back to the hotel. The sooner I get the tabloids my friend always takes, the better."

Glad to be of any use, I took her at her word and started off at a rapid pace. Our short cut involved pursuing paths scarcely worthy of the name.

She was as fleet of foot as myself, and poor Mademoiselle followed in our wake as best she could.

About half-way home I received a shock which greatly troubled me. As I have said, I chose some very unorthodox paths, and, as I was threading my way along one across which the over-spreading boughs were scarcely cleared, forgetting how closely I was followed, I carelessly allowed a branch I had pushed away from my face to swing back. I heard a sharp cry of annoyance. The released branch had caught the lady's hat, almost knocking it off her head. In a flash she adroitly righted it, but not before I had seen the jet-black hair, beneath the displaced hat, surprisingly shift to one side, as it did so revealing some two inches of glowing *red* hair !

I'm not sure whether she saw that I had seen, but she looked flushed and disconcerted, and it was in complete silence that we finished our helter-skelter walk to the hotel.

I don't quite know why I was so disquieted by my chance discovery, but somehow I felt a sudden sagging

of my natural trustfulness. Whether straightforward or not themselves, I think that most children attach great importance to truthfulness in those they love. It may seem absurd to use the word " love " in connection with a stranger, but no other word describes the emotion this lady had inspired in me.

Why, oh, why, in that conversation to which I had so eagerly listened last night, had she taken the trouble to tell her friend that she had had her hair *dyed*? " Wigs always look so unnatural. You can't get them right." I remembered her very words.

I expostulated with myself. How she achieved a desired disguise was surely a trivial matter, and no doubt there was some quite simple explanation. Perhaps she was going to surprise her friend by appearing in her natural colouring that very evening? A sort of practical joke? Nevertheless, I could not quite banish the distress from my mind. Her annoyance, too, over the mishap of the branch, seemed out of all proportion to the calamity of a displaced hat.

One way and another I felt disillusioned.

On our arrival I heard her ask for her luggage to be brought down and a carriage ordered.

Dejectedly I went up to my room. Not very long afterwards, hearing the clatter of horses' hoofs, I leant out of the window. A carriage driven by a fat man with a black patch over one eye had drawn up. Some luggage was piled on to the back seat, and the lady, now dressed in a plain beige cloak and a small blue hat, stepped into the carriage. As the fat man with the black patch cracked his whip, she glanced upwards, and, seeing me, kissed her hand and smiled with all the radiance that had enslaved me the day before. My discouraged devotion flared up. Let her wear as many wigs as she chose and make any sort of a fool of her dull friend, what cared I? I would remain her devoted slave. But, alas! should I ever see her again?

The rattling carriage had now disappeared. She was gone. . . .

Lessons had never seemed so pointless, nor Mademoiselle so dreary. At tea-time she discovered that a hole in her pocket had led to the loss of her purse. In high agitation she announced that we must retrace our footsteps in the hope of finding the lost property.

Indifferent, I acquiesced. All ways in that vast and senselessly beautiful forest were now equally uninteresting to me. It was already quite four hours since the lady's departure. No doubt she was already long since in Paris, the centre of the brilliance and gaiety her personality suggested.

I tried to concentrate on the diligent search for the lost purse. Mademoiselle promised me a half-holiday as a reward if I should find it, but I had no particular use for a half-holiday. With bent heads, progressing at a snail's pace, the walk seemed endless, and it was not until we were within ten yards of the corner leading to the ladies' picnicking place that, with a cry of joy, Mademoiselle descried her purse lying, as it had fallen, right in the middle of the path. Her anxiety thus relieved, she became excruciatingly conscious of the corns to which she was, as she constantly complained, an " absolute martyr."

" Ah ! " she exclaimed. " My feet burn ! I will take my boots off and give them a few moments' rest."

" All right," I answered. " I'll stroll on and turn back in two minutes." In my dejected state, movement was at least preferable to standing still. A few listless strides brought me to the turning. The familiar oak tree came in sight, and I stopped dead, and stared in amazement. I literally rubbed my eyes, for the scene was not the empty one I had expected. There, in full view, her back propped against the broad oak, her bent arm supporting the garish parasol, still reclined the figure of her whom I had come to think of as " the other lady."

The flowers and the half of an orange still lay in her lap, the disengaged hand beside them. She was in exactly the same position as when I had last seen her. How extraordinary! I remembered the lovely lady's obvious anxiety to catch the next train. Had she, then, failed to find her friend? Was she perhaps still vainly searching through the forest? She might be quite close. Possibly I should see her again! But fancy her friend having slept on through all these hours! Slept she must have, else why was she still in the same position? It *was* precisely the same position. I remembered noticing the acute angle at which the elbow of the arm holding up the parasol was bent.

Surely it was a peculiarly stiff position for a sleeper. And what a long sleep! Why, it must be quite six hours since I last saw her. Mademoiselle and I had walked so slowly whilst searching for the purse.

I now noticed with surprise that she was bare-headed; and where was the small, smart, winged hat? Nowhere in sight.

As I stared at the still figure, I felt a strange drumming in my ears, and my breath came fast and rather painfully because of the queer way in which my heart was thumping.

My thoughts scarcely shaped the misgiving which assailed me. All I knew then was that not for anything in the world would I have approached one step nearer to that stiff, propped figure, flecked by the slanting shafts of the evening sun.

An undefined dread of my own half-formed threatening thoughts seized me. Horror hovered—but no! no! no! I shut it out.

My one imperative instinct was that on no account must Mademoiselle see what I had seen.

As quickly as possible I wanted to get back to the hotel. Yes, that was the thing to do—get back. Probably at the hotel I should find some quite simple explanation. Things would turn out to be all right, wouldn't they?

Surely, surely! Anyhow, I wanted to move as quickly as possible and to be walking away and away from that sickeningly still figure. Somehow I couldn't bear to let Mademoiselle see my face. Muttering that I was fearfully thirsty, I passed her just as she had rebuttoned her boots. Feebly expostulating at my headlong pace, she followed.

Silently I plunged on, and, in spite of her corns, the devoted woman managed for some time to keep close behind.

My thoughts were whirring, and for the last quarter of a mile I ran, reaching the hotel quite five minutes before Mademoiselle.

Just as I entered the courtyard, I heard the clop, clop, of horse's hoofs, and a fly, driven by a fat man with a patch across one eye, rattled over the cobble-stones.

Except for some luggage on the back seat, the fly was empty.

Flinging the reins onto his horse's back, the driver jumped down from the box and clattered into the hotel. I followed him to the office, where, in his illiterate French and with much shrugging and gesticulating, he delivered himself of his strange story.

"The dark lady from here," with the luggage, had told him to drive to a certain crossways in the forest. There she had got out, saying she went to fetch a friend whom she had left not far from the carriage drive, that she would return in at most ten minutes, and then they would proceed to the station.

He told how he had waited and waited, at first with, and then without, patience. For five hours he had been without food or drink, but the lady had never returned. He had not dared leave his horse and go and search the footpaths. He had shouted and shouted, but no answer had come.

What was he to do now? he asked himself, and how about his fare and his wasted day? He did not care for such customers! "No, thank you!"

The hotel staff volubly expressed their astonishment, but I did not stay to hear anything further. I rushed upstairs, and, to gain time, locked myself into the bathroom.

I could not face Mademoiselle, and yet I could not bear to be with my own thoughts. Could the lady with the lovely voice have failed to find the way to her friend? It was possible. But then surely she could have managed to get back to her carriage. It was scarcely conceivable that anyone could miss the broad carriage drive. Perhaps she was ill, as well as her friend, ill or——

Perhaps they had both been poisoned? I pleaded a headache and went early to bed. Mademoiselle ordered her evening meal on a tray, and did not go down again, so she heard no hotel gossip. The maid who brought up the dinner might have said something, but seeing me lying with closed eyelids she did not speak. By keeping my eyes tightly shut, I avoided all conversation with Mademoiselle, merely giving an inaudible grunt when she said: "Thank goodness that at least we have peace to-night, now those two ladies with their ceaseless chatter are happily gone."

Peace to-night? My ears could still hear their "chatter," just as clearly as last night. Their chatter? Yes, their chatter and their kisses. . . .

It is impossible to describe the following days and how my crumbling confidence was gradually soaked through by an infiltering flood of horror. It is difficult to distinguish what I thought at the time from what I now think that I must have thought. A genuine headache and a sub-conscious shrinking from further news kept me long in bed the next morning. When at last I was stealing apprehensively down the stairs, I saw two gendarmes in the hall. They were surrounded by the entire staff of the hotel. Many voices were talking in shrill excitement, and there was a general impression of flustered emotion. When I had nearly reached the bottom stair, Mademoiselle, her face white and strained, detached herself from the

gesticulating group, and rushed towards me. Saying that I looked dreadfully ill, she scuffled me back to my bedroom and kept me there all day.

Early the next morning we left the hotel. I was given no explanation of our hurried departure, and was consistently treated like a very young child. To what extent this conspiracy of silence augmented my sufferings it is impossible to convey. If anyone had frankly talked to me of the mystery which obsessed me, I am sure my nightmare sufferings would have been less agonising and less enduring.

But all my questionings of Mademoiselle—in fact, any mention of the two Parisian ladies—were only answered by: "Tais-toi."

I began to feel as though I had committed a crime, so haunted was I both when awake and when dreaming. In my dreams everyone had red hair and a kiss was death. And always before my eyes was that stiff propped-up figure—so gaily dressed—so shockingly still.

By bribing housemaids to procure me newspapers, and cross-questioning everyone I saw as often as I managed to evade Mademoiselle's vigilance, I gradually pieced together the melodrama that for some time caused the hotel to be the most talked of in Europe. I will repeat the story, not in the sequence in which it filtered through to my own knowledge, but as the events succeeded one another.

On the evening of the angry coachman's return to our hotel, a woodcutter walking home from his work in the forest noticed a smartly-dressed but hatless lady leaning against a tree. It was after sunset, and he thought it a little odd that she should be holding up a parasol. The next morning, as he set out to work by the same path, he was amazed to see the same figure in precisely the same position. His suspicions aroused, he approached, and discovered that the woman was dead. He immediately informed the police. The coachman's story of his missing

fare told them which hotel to apply to, and before noon the sensation had spread like wildfire, and every servant in the hotel was basking in the glare of publicity.

The inquest revealed that the murdered woman had been drugged by means of an orange—half of which lay uneaten on her lap—and then pierced through the temple, probably by a hatpin.

The initials on the dead lady's handkerchief and underclothes did not correspond with either of the names under which the two Parisians were registered in the hotel book.

It was remembered that the other lady had entered both their names.

The luggage left behind bore no name, and was merely labelled to one of the chief Paris stations, and its contents held no clue as to identity. No trace could be found at the station of this large provincial town of a dark-haired lady in a beige cloak and blue hat.

Months afterwards, by the merest chance, a black wig, a small blue hat, and a beige cloak were found flung away in a very thick, pathless part of the forest.

Even though seven hundred people had taken travelling tickets on the day of the murder, the man who issued them might have remembered a surprisingly beautiful red-haired woman, probably attired in plain black, with a small winged hat, but for such a woman no enquiries were ever made. Under cross-examination he claimed to recall about twenty beautiful ladies with black hair and eyebrows.

Neither had the porters noticed any dark woman travelling without luggage.

Whatever my dreams, no mention of "red hair" escaped my lips. For years afterwards I could scarcely hear those two words without a start. It became a real "complex."

When she left the carriage, no doubt the lovely lady walked straight to the crowded station and left by the first train. No, not straight. She must first have taken the

hat from her dead friend's head. She could not travel in that in which she had been seen leaving the hotel.

A photograph of the dead woman was circulated. This and her initials shortly led to her identification.

To me this identification was a second shock, the effects of which I can scarcely describe.

At that "schwärmerish" age my imagination had been entirely captured by a young poet, of remarkable personal beauty, whose precocious and peculiar genius had newly taken the reading world by storm. I will give him the pseudonym of Léon le Roi. His moonlit muse was not destined to survive the daylight of posterity. He is now long forgotten. But at that time he had subjugated both critic and schoolgirl, and his romantic features were as familiar to an adoring public as are now those of the most popular of film stars. I myself cherished no less than three photographs of him, and my memory was packed with his sonnets, laboriously committed to memory. It had never occurred to me to speculate as to his personal life. To me he was a radiant emanation rather than a fellow-creature—a "pard-like spirit, beautiful and swift," not a Frenchman who ate luncheon, wore hats, and must be either a married man or a bachelor. Imagine my feelings when it was established beyond doubt that the poor murdered woman in the forest had been his wife! That sallow, commonplace creature the chosen of Léon le Roi! And he, my imagination's idol, now in the blinding limelight of this hideous melodrama!

No sort of an explanation was ever advanced, no shadow of a motive discovered. The poet was away from his house in Paris on a distant visit to his mother. When he returned, his servants told him that his wife had gone away for a day or two, leaving a letter for him. In giving his evidence, he said this letter informed him that she had gone away for a change of air, and would be back at latest on the day of his return. She gave the name of her

destination, but not the hotel, on which she said she would decide on arrival. He denied any knowledge as to whom her companion might have been, and insisted that she had made no mention of going *with* anyone.

When asked to produce this letter, telling of his wife's plans, he expressed his great regret at having destroyed it before he heard the terrible news. He professed himself quite unable to recall any friend of his wife answering to the description given by the witnesses from the hotel. None of her very few intimate associates happened to be dark. She had left her home and driven to the station alone.

Needless to say, *l'Affair du Fôret*, as it was called, became one of the most sensational of undetected crimes.

Detectives were perhaps less redoubtable than they have since become. In any case, the mystery remained unsolved. No arrest was ever made. Another murderer went unpunished by man.

Gradually the feverish interest subsided, and *l'Affair du Fôret* became a thing of the past.

Needless to say, every aspect of the tragedy remained vividly impressed on my mind. I was still haunted by the recollection of the vanished lady. I could hear her radiant voice, see her shimmering beauty, remember her brilliant, sweet gaiety.

I could also see that sickeningly still figure stiffly propped against the tree. Gradually perhaps my impressions might have faded, but this was not to be.

My haunting experience had a sequel. The effect on me of that sequel I leave to the reader's imagination.

One summer's day, about two years after these events, I was strolling through the Bois de Boulogne. Passing a bench on which a woman was seated reading aloud, I was violently struck by the quality of her voice. Could there possibly be two such voices? My heart wildly beating, I turned and stared at the reader. I saw a lovely young woman of extreme and dazzling fairness of

complexion. Her discarded hat lay on her lap, and the sun, stealing through the network of leaves, lit up the red-gold glory of her hair. Of her radiant loveliness there could be no question. If she had a fault, her eyebrows and lashes were perhaps too pale, but even this added something to the ethereal quality of her fairy-tale looks.

At her feet, his hands clasped round his knees, sat a young man, his dark head thrown back as he gazed up at her.

His beautiful face was as familiar to me as my own.

It was the famous poet Léon le Roi.

Almost startled out of my reason, I could scarcely suppress a cry, but I hurried past. In my first confusion I was only conscious of one impulse : to get out of sight, in case she should cease reading and look up and see me and the expression on my face.

She might recognise me.

I do not know what other girls might have done. I only know that to take any steps in this bewildering matter never for one second crossed my mind. God knows I was sufficiently troubled, but not by any questioning as to my own responsibility. That never occurred to me.

As one gets older, one often asks : " Is it all worth while? Is life and its *potential* happiness worth such suffering as is inevitable? Does Humanity ever get in bliss a tithe of what it pays in pain? Apart from a man's opportunity, is his capacity for joy equal to his capacity for suffering? One or two recollections make me answer : " Yes, it is worth while." Amongst these evidences of human bliss, the most eloquent is the expression I can still see in that poet's eyes as he gazed on the face of that woman.

Come what might, to him life must be accounted worth while. For him the game *was* worth the candle. Never shall I forget that look on his face. Rapture and peace so seldom meet.

There is only one more thing to tell. Shortly after I saw these two in the Bois de Boulogne, my mother and I were visiting some friends in Paris.

The blood rushed to my face as I heard the lady who was pouring out my tea say to my mother, "Fancy, yesterday I met poor Léon le Roi's new wife. She's the most lovely creature."

"Yes," said my hostess's sister. "I remember seeing her once before. She made a great sensation at Madame de B——'s Fancy Dress Ball, where she appeared as Medea. I remember people said it was incorrect for Medea to have red hair, but I thought her so right not to sacrifice her own lovely colouring."

The next day in my doctor's waiting-room I came across some very far back numbers of a Society paper.

One of them contained an account of Madame de B——'s Fancy Dress Ball two years before. I looked at the date. The ball had taken place on August 31st, the evening of the day after that on which Léon le Roi's first wife had been murdered.

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